

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## Monterey, California



### THESIS

**THE FUTURE OF THE ROK-US ALLIANCE IN THE  
CONTEXT OF KOREAN UNIFICATION**

by

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December 2000

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UNIFICATION**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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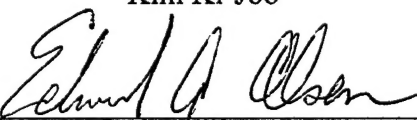
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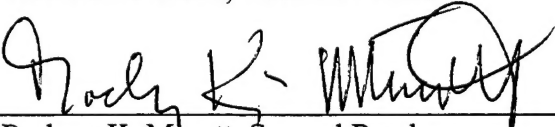
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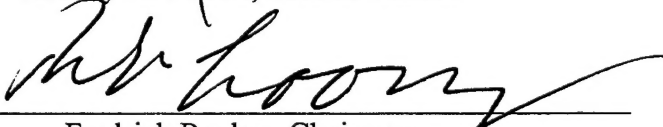
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## **ABSTRACT**

After the Korean War, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States signed a Mutual Defense Treaty on October 1, 1953. There were many conflicts and challenges between the ROK and the United States in keeping the relationship strong. Nevertheless, the ROK-US alliance has successfully defended South Korea from the volatile threat of North Korea and maintained stability and peace in Northeast Asia. After the historical North-South Summit talks in June 2000, Korean unification is more likely now than it has been at any other time since Korea's division. Once Korea is unified peacefully under South Korea's leadership, however, Korean unification will bring into question the necessity of the ROK-US alliance. In other words, the diluting of the strategic goals of the alliance, regional concerns toward the further strengthening of today's ROK-US alliance, and growing Korean national self-consciousness for self-defense and antagonism against foreign powers undoubtedly will pressure the Korea-US alliance to modify its role and nature into a more flexible and limited alliance. Given these situations, the most important means to compensate for a weakened former bilateral alliance will be a Northeast Asian multilateral security system in conjunction with the growing economic, political, and security interdependence throughout the region.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. RELEVANCE**

At the end of World War II, American troops landed on the Korean peninsula. American troops occupied the southern area, below the thirty-eighth parallel, while Soviet troops occupied the northern area. After establishment of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1948, both the United States and the Soviet Unions withdrew their occupation forces from Korea. The United States paid little attention to Korea's potential in terms of economic and strategic values. As part of this comparative indifference, the Acheson policy line formally announced US relative disinterest in Korea, which ultimately may helped bring about the Korean War. Since their involvement in the Korean War, US forces have maintained a presence in Korea to provide security for South Korea. During much of the Cold War, a weak and unstable South Korean government facing a volatile threat from North Korea, could resolve its security dilemma largely through the ROK-US alliance.

In fact, there were many conflicts and challenges between the ROK and the United States in keeping the relationship strong. Nevertheless, the ROK-US alliance has successfully accomplished its main role, to defend South Korea from an external threat. In addition, the alliance has contributed to stability and peace in Northeast Asia. Both countries frequently have acknowledged that their solid alliance has been an indispensable factor for their vital national interests.

The termination of the Cold War and collapse of the communist bloc have produced dramatic changes in the world security order. There is no doubt that the post-Cold War



era has created a more negative security environment for North Korea. After Kim Il Sung's sudden death in 1994, North Korea has muddled through to maintain its communist system despite economic downfall, political instability, and external sanctions. Meanwhile, North Korea has sought to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to ensure its security. Although North Korea has continued to resist opening its door fully to the outer world, North Korea has slowly recognized that international cooperation is necessary for survival. As a result, North Korea recently held the first ever summit talks with South Korea in June, 2000 and agreed, in simple terms, to the North-South reconciliation.

The two Koreas now are taking one more step towards reunification. Although it will take a long time to accomplish complete unification, the possibility and feasibility of Korean unification is more likely now than it has been at any other time since Korea's division. Given the current situation, it is an appropriate time to reexamine the ROK-US alliance and the future direction of the security cooperation between a Unified Korea and the United States after Korean unification.

## **B. HYPOTHESIS**

This thesis assumes that South Korea will continue to be a successor state after unification. Thus, the ROK-US alliance will change to a Unified Korea-US alliance. The hypothesis is that peaceful unification will bring into question the necessity of the ROK-US alliance. The threat from North Korea has provided a justification for the alliance. However, the ultimate goal of the alliance, protecting South Korea from North Korea,

will be diluted after reunification. Therefore, it will be hard for the alliance to exist without any obvious purpose or functions.

One other hypothesis is that the countries neighboring the Korean peninsula will be very sensitive toward the further strengthening of today's ROK-US alliance after Korean unification. Especially, China and Russia will try to draw Unified Korea into their respective spheres of influence. These regional concerns will be a major obstacle in keeping a solid alliance between the prospective Unified Korea and the United States.

In addition, this thesis assumes that Korean unification will generate a growing Korean national self-consciousness for self-defense and possible antagonism against foreign powers. Koreans, both North and South, have experienced a long entanglement of foreign intervention. The people of Unified Korea, therefore, will require an independent self-defense. At the same time, antagonism against foreign influence will also create an enthusiastic desire for proactive self-defense by Korean armed forces.

Given these hypotheses, the ROK-US alliance will face simultaneously external and internal challenges in the future as the ROK becomes part of a Unified Korea. It has no choice but to modify its role and nature into a more flexible and limited alliance. In conjunction, just as economic, political, and security interdependence is growing throughout the region, a Northeast Asian multilateral security system will be an important means for Unified Korea to compensate for the weakened former bilateral alliance.

### **C. ORGANIZATION**

Based on the above assumptions, this thesis will analyze primary sources such as government documents and official statements. Also, contemporary literature, newspapers, and periodicals will be analyzed. In addition, theoretical models will be applied.

In support of this thesis, chapter two will examine US policy toward the ROK-US alliance. It is worthwhile understanding historical aspects in projecting the future. The origin, development process, and policies of the ROK and the US toward the ROK-US alliance will be the main topics examined in that chapter. Furthermore, this chapter will analyze the short-term prospects of US policy toward the alliance.

Chapter three will discuss US policy toward North Korea. Undoubtedly, North Korea's threat has been regarded as a primary motivation in maintaining the ROK-US alliance. It is necessary to analyze the relations between the US and the DPRK from their evolution to their current phase so as to envision a future portrait of the Korea-US alliance. The evolution, historical review, and near-term prospects for US-DPRK relations will be described in Chapter three.

Chapter four will evaluate the impacts of Korean unification on the alliance and the security environment in East Asia. Korean unification will bring big challenges or opportunities to East Asian countries as well as to the United States. Thus, it is might be possible to identify what kinds of impacts and ramifications might occur after Korean unification.

Chapter five will describe future models of the Korea-US alliance. Based on analysis of previous chapters, this chapter will seek to answer the following questions: What are the possible alternatives of the Korea-US alliance and what is the most plausible option to choose? Finally, a policy recommendation and conclusion will be presented for both the ROK and US in the last chapter.

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## II. US POLICY TOWARD THE ROK-US ALLIANCE

### A. THE ORIGINS OF THE ROK-US ALLIANCE

Why do nations exist? Since the formation of the modern state structure, one of the most important functions of the state has been to protect its sovereignty in the face of external threats from aggressive powers. In the light of this view, the strong nation possesses enough inherent capabilities to survive, while the weak nation is forced to rely on other alternatives. One of those alternatives for the weak state is to establish an alliance relationship with a stronger power. In the case of the strong state, it may choose an alliance partnership only as a means of achieving its own strategic goals.

There are various accepted definitions of an alliance. Some of them have narrow meanings and others have more broad ones. For instance, Ole R. Holsti explains that "An alliance is a formal agreement between two or more nations to collaborate on national security issues."<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, George Liska argues that "Put affirmatively, states enter into alliances with one another in order to supplement each other's capability. Put negatively, an alliance is a means of reducing the impact of antagonistic power, perceived as pressure, which threatens one's independence."<sup>2</sup>

Given the above definitions, the origins of the ROK-US alliance can be described as a ramification stemming from competing strategic aims between keeping a balance of power during the Cold War era and resolving national security crises. In other words, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ole R. Holsti, Unity and Disintegration in International Alliance: Comparative Studies, John Wiley & Sons, 1973, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> George Liska, Nations In Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1962, p. 26.

United States sought to prevent South Korea from falling into the communist bloc, while South Korea sought to obtain a guarantee for its own national survival.

Before World War II, Americans took little notice of the potential value of Korea, which had been a Japanese colony since 1910. During World War Two, the United States with Britain and China announced in the Cairo Declaration in 1943 that “in due course, Korea shall become free and independent,” and proposed a U.S.-Soviet-Chinese trusteeship over Korea at the 1945 Yalta Conference. However, the United States slowly realized that Soviet troops, which had launched into Manchuria and northern Korea, would be a serious obstacle for American postwar policy in East Asia.<sup>3</sup>

After the Pacific War, the Soviet Union occupied the northern half of the Korean peninsula. Meanwhile, the United States policed the southern Korean peninsula. Korea was divided by a demarcation line at the thirty-eighth parallel. As a result of reckless judgment by the major powers, the two Koreas were separated on diametrically opposed principles and their sponsors became more and more hostile toward each other.<sup>4</sup>

As the Cold War deepened, the United States faced a growing antagonistic confrontation with the Soviet Union throughout the world. During that time, however, the United States paid relatively little attention to East Asia as compared to Europe. As a result of that comparative indifference, the United States effectively lost China. Simply put, Mao Zedong, who led the Chinese communists, defeated the US-friendly Kuomintang in a civil war and declared the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949.

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<sup>3</sup> Don Oberdorfer, The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History, Basic Books, 1997, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

Whatever the reason for the Chinese communist victory, it was definitely a striking issue to US decision-makers. Communized China became a major factor in US policy in Asia in the overall framework of containing the communist bloc through economic, political, and military means.

Despite expanding communist power in East Asia, the American strategic priority still was not on the Korean peninsula, but rather on other Asia-Pacific countries. This explains why, in January 1950, Secretary of State, Dean Acheson announced a perimeter defense line from the Aleutian Islands in the north through Japan and the Philippines, down to Australia and New Zealand in the south, excluding the Korean peninsula. The exclusion of American interests in Korea gave North Korea ample motivation to initiate the Korean War.<sup>5</sup>

As a response to US containment strategy, the PRC and the Soviet Union signed a military pact and military assistance agreement in February 1950. In the wake of launching Cold War competition, the two Koreas became stationed unintentionally in the middle of a global struggle line between the free world and the communist world.

In the early morning of June 25, 1950, North Korean troops invaded South Korea without any warning. Until recently, the origins of the Korean War have been a hot issue of debate. Bruce Cumings contends that the Korean War was a civil war and that South Korea provoked the North to initiate the war.<sup>6</sup> However, it is generally agreed that the

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Yahuda, The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific, 1945-1995, Routledge, 1996, pp. 118-119.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Cummings, The Origins of the Korean War, Vol II, Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 619.



majority of opinions vis-à-vis “Who started the Korean War?” supports the argument that North Korea, with Soviet and Chinese consent and support, attacked South Korea in an effort to reunify Korea by force of arms.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after the outbreak of the Korean War, the United States and fifteen other UN countries quickly became involved in the war after harsh condemnation of North Korea’s cruel attack. The motivation for prompt intervention by the United States was based on a fear of “falling dominoes” in Asia, losing trust from Europe allies, and a strategic concern about Soviet pressure in Europe and Asia.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, the ultimate aim of the United States in the Korean War was limited. The United States did not want to widen the war by attacking China after being faced with massive Chinese intervention. Thus, the Truman administration refused to accept General MacArthur’s proposals for extending the war into China. The main reason for that refusal originated from the American traditional strategic concept, which regarded Europe as the crucial arena in the confrontation with the Soviet Union. The United States policy makers believed that the extension of the war into China would weaken the European defense line and endanger Europe.<sup>9</sup> In the light of this strategic concept, the

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<sup>7</sup> Callum A. MacDonald, Korea The War Before Vietnam, The Free Press, 1986, pp. 27-30.

<sup>8</sup> Jae-Kap Yoo, The Korean War and the Nature of ROK-US Relations: A Historical Character In Terms of the Origins, Process, and Result of the Korean War (Hangukchunjaengkwa Hanmikkwangaewi Sungguk: Chunjaengwi Wonin, Kuajung, Kuelkwae Bichue Bon Yanggukkwangaewi Yeksajuk Sungguk), The Institute for Far Eastern Studies (Kukdong Munje Yonguso), 1988, pp. 43-44.

<sup>9</sup> Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy, Indiana University Press, 1973, p. 390.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Bradley, believed that fighting in China because of events in Korea would be “the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy.”<sup>10</sup>

When the war was going into its stalemate phase, the United States tried to find an honorable escape from the war. While negotiations were occurring, the Rhee Syng-Man government strongly opposed any armistice negotiations. When an armistice became inevitable, President Rhee asked for promises of aid and a mutual defense treaty based on the guarantee of military security by the United States.<sup>11</sup>

The Eisenhower administration, however, did not wish to be associated with such a treaty. As a superpower, it was not necessary to be entangled with a relatively low strategic priority. However, for South Korea, the problem of national survival necessitated a security guarantee from the United States. Thus, the Rhee government, which had no real negotiation leverage, threatened the US government by stating that South Korea would continue to fight North Korea without UN troops. In response to this brinkmanship, the United States made efforts to soothe the Rhee government, such as promising military aid and a guarantee of maintaining friendly relations after the Korean War. However, the United States avoided promising a mutual defense treaty.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the United States even planned a compulsory means of South Korean cooperation, namely “Operation Eveready” which included a plan to substitute

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph C. Goulden, Korea: The Untold Story of the War, New York Times Books, 1982, p. XV.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Yahuda, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>12</sup> Callum A. MacDonald, op. cit., pp. 191-192.

the Rhee government with a UN command government. To demonstrate South Korea's autonomy, the Rhee government abruptly released 25,000 communist POWs on June 18, 1953 without any notice to the United States. This act was enough to prove South Korea's unchangeable attitude toward a mutual defense treaty and forced Washington to take a more cooperative approach.<sup>13</sup>

In the end, the ROK and the United States signed a Mutual Defense Treaty on October 1, 1953. The ROK-US alliance can be defined as a by-product of US-Soviet confrontations. Although the United States reluctantly agreed to responsible alliance relations, it benefited from obtaining a forward base from which to carry out its global strategy. In the case of the ROK government, it had no choice but to depend on a foreign security umbrella. It was an indispensable requirement for its national survival to obtain a security guarantee from a strong state. The two countries shared the same strategic aim of protecting the free world from communist expansion. This shared purpose was a solid foundation for keeping the alliance strong during the Cold War.

## **B. HISTORICAL TRENDS IN THE ROK-US ALLIANCE**

More than any bilateral alliance relationship in the world, the ROK-US alliance can be described as successful. The alliance has contributed to the victory of the United States in the long competition with the Soviet Union and also to the continued defense of South Korea from North Korea's volatile threat. The United States has acknowledged that the alliance has a global dimension, whereas South Korea has limited the role of the

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<sup>13</sup> Callum A. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

alliance to just Korean affairs. Although each side has held different strategic concepts about the alliance, they have coincided in the purpose of protecting democracy from the threat of the communist world.

Many factors, such as external threats, ideology, culture, and domestic and international circumstances, can influence the maintenance of alliance relations. Without exception, the ROK-US alliance has also experienced various external and internal challenges. Thus, it is necessary to explore the development process of the ROK-US alliance from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era.

The ROK-US alliance has gone through several phases, caused by changes in the internal and external environments of the two countries. These phases include: unilateral assistance of the United States from the 1950's to the mid-1960's, shaken commitment of the United States from the late 1960's to the 1970's during the Vietnam War era, back to the solid relations in the 1980's in the Reagan-Chun years, and simultaneous opportunity and crisis in the alliance in 1990's.

After the Korean War, both Koreas were completely devastated. The fighting had resolved nothing and only brought pain to a divided Korea. Millions of people died, became separated, or were lost during the war. Nearly half of the industrial capacity, a third of the housing, and much of the public infrastructure in the South was destroyed

with much of the same situation in the North.<sup>14</sup> It is a truth that “War is a devil of heartbreak and an angel of destruction.”<sup>15</sup>

In the aftermath of the war, the Rhee government wanted a self-reliant industrial base and robust military capability against North Korea. Indeed, South Korea received more than \$2 billion in U.S. economic aid between 1954 and 1960. In addition, the United States also provided military assistance such as advanced weapons and technology for the purpose of facilitating the modernization of the ROK military on the basis of the mutual defense treaty.<sup>16</sup> However, President Rhee personally felt that the aid from the US was inadequate given South Korea’s needs. As a staunch anti-communist, he was concerned about a reinvasion by North Korea. As an anti-Japanese leader, he was concerned about the reemergence of Japan as a dominant power in East Asia. Hence, President Rhee disliked the close ties between the U.S. and Japan.<sup>17</sup> As a result, he asked that the United States should provide everything to Korea that it had provided to Japan. His wish was that “South Korea had to be another Japan.”<sup>18</sup> The United States provided its sincere support for the sake of containing communism and alleviating Rhee’s

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Borthwick, Pacific Century: The Emergence of Modern Pacific Asia, Westview Press, 1998, p. 387.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Cumings, Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1997, p. 302.

<sup>16</sup> Sung-Joo Han, “South Korea and the United States: Past, Present, and Future,” in Gerald L. Curtis, Sung-Joo Han ed., The US-South Korean Alliance, LexingtonBooks, 1983, p. 207.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>18</sup> Cumings, Bruce, Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1997, p. 305.

uncompromising attitude. Meanwhile, the Rhee regime, facing domestic chaos, became more and more dictatorial as well as corrupt. In the end, a student uprising against the Rhee regime in April 1960 brought his retreat from the presidential Blue House.

To be sure, the Rhee government had no choice but to rely on US aid to recover from the war and protect it from the threat of North Korea and possibly Japan. Although South Korea was demoted to a client state during the Rhee presidency due to its over dependence on the United States, the Rhee government created a close alliance relationship with the United States.

After the short lived Chang Myon government (1960-1961), General Park Chung Hee took over the office by means of a violent military coup in May 1961. He stood in the center of the ROK-US relations until his assassination in 1979. As a reaction to Park's illegal coup, the United States strongly urged the peaceful transfer of the Korean government back to civilian control. The United States tried various means of pressuring Park, such as threatening the reduction of economic and military assistance. In other words, the United States did not fully recognize the legitimacy of the Park government. Meanwhile, President Park was sensitive to interference by the United States in internal Korean affairs. For this reason, he strongly became aware of the necessity of economic development and political independence.<sup>19</sup> Thus, he tried to increase independence from Washington economically, diplomatically, as well as militarily. To achieve his aims, President Park normalized relations with Japan in 1965 in spite of huge domestic

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<sup>19</sup> Chun-Il Jung, "The Past, Present, and Future of the ROK-US Alliance: Evolution of Conflict and Future Development" (Hanmigunsadongmaengwi Kwagu, Hyunjae, Mirae: Kaldungwi Saengsungkwa Miraebaljun), Defense Comment (Kukbang Nonjip), Summer, 1996, p. 175.

opposition. As a result of normalization with Japan, South Korea could begin to reduce its economic dependence on the United States and used largely Japanese economic investment to support Korean economic plans. At the same time, the United States also reduced its defense burden in Asia by South Korea's increasing role in its own defense costs.

The United States military assistance to South Korea was becoming smaller. The average amount of annual U.S. military aid dropped from \$232 million during the Fiscal Years (FY) 1956-1961 to \$154 million for the FY 1962-1965 period.<sup>20</sup> To encourage the United States to support South Korea and warm up the frozen relations, President Park made a decision to send South Korean troops to the Vietnam War in 1965. The Johnson administration, which was suffering from the Vietnam turmoil, welcomed Park's proposal and reciprocated by reaffirming its strong commitment toward South Korea during Johnson's visit to Seoul in November 1966. Through the dispatch of troops, the ROK government could not only improve the alliance relationship, but also obtain economic benefits and military aid from the United States.

The American failure in the Vietnam War was a huge shock to the free world countries which had maintained alliance relationships with the United States, including South Korea. They were discomforted by the weakness of the big power and became concerned about the ability of the United States to keep its security commitments. In the late 1960's the United States had begun to reassess its strategic security concept toward Asia in response to the "Vietnam syndrome," caused by a protracted and frustrating war

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<sup>20</sup> Gerald L., Curtis, Sung-Joo Han, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

in Vietnam, and in response to domestic difficulties such as an economic deficit, hostile public opinion, and Congressional friction with the White House.<sup>21</sup>

Under these situations, President Nixon addressed his doctrine in Guam on July 1969. President Nixon laid down three principles as guidelines for future American policy toward Asia: "First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments. Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security. Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower of its defense."<sup>22</sup> Right after the declaration of his doctrine, President Nixon emphasized the concept of self-help and self-reliance at the San Francisco summit talks with President Park in August 1969. The Nixon doctrine led to the US withdrawal from Vietnam, and it raised questions in Korea about the resolve of the United States to maintain its commitments on South Korea. Indeed, South Korean concerns had become reality.

On March 20, 1970, the United States issued National Security Decision Memorandum 48, which included a plan for the withdrawal of one U.S. infantry division from South Korea and a program for five years of military modernization and additional

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<sup>21</sup> Wesley M. Bagby, America's International Relations since World War I, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 252-260.

<sup>22</sup> Richard H. Nixon, "Vietnamization," November 03, 1969, from <http://www.Tamu.edu/scom/pres/speeches/rmnvietnam.html>, accessed 11 September, 2000.



economic assistance in order to compensate for the troop reduction.<sup>23</sup> Needless to say, President Park's reaction toward Nixon's unilateral security decision was very negative and distrustful. Particularly in 1971, Park was facing a tough reelection campaign against the current ROK president (Kim Dae-Jung) and simultaneously the reaffirmation of militant solidarity between the PRC and the DPRK. Thus, he strongly told US Ambassador William Porter that "the United States had no right to remove its troops from South Korea."<sup>24</sup> However, the right of choice belongs to the big state in an asymmetrical relations. In the end, the Nixon administration withdrew 24,000 soldiers from South Korea by 1973.

The impact of the Nixon Doctrine on the ROK-US alliance was very detrimental. The Park government began to build up its self-defense, initiate a nuclear program, and establish diplomatic ties with the third world. The alliance was weakened step by step. One of the most important things that should be noted was that the United States lost trust from South Korea and set the stage for US-ROK problems in the future.

The relatively broken alliance did not get better even after Nixon's resignation. Before President Carter was inaugurated, he proclaimed a pullout from South Korea as a presidential campaign pledge. He might have had a very unfriendly image toward the Park government because of Park's authoritarian political rule and poor human rights environment. In early 1977, the Carter administration announced a plan for the pullout of

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<sup>23</sup> Investigation of Korean-American Relations: Report, pp. 61-61.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

all remaining USFK (United States Forces Korea) in the coming four to five years. Undoubtedly, the ROK government was very displeased with President Carter's plan.<sup>25</sup>

In order to shape political pressure against President Carter's pullout plan, the South Korean government sponsored a Korean lobbyist, Park Tong-Son, to persuade a number of US congressmen and officials through political bribes. These activities were revealed as the "Koreagate scandal" by the American press. Although the Koreagate scandal did not substantially affect US policy toward Korea, in principle, it resulted in tremendous impacts on the US policy-making process. In other words, the United States became more willing to deal with Korean issues more openly. For South Korea, however, the Koreagate scandal undermined Seoul's effective diplomatic ability and international credibility.<sup>26</sup>

In regard to military pullout, President Carter faced strong resistance from Congress and military leaders. In particular, the JCS clearly stated a reluctance toward the pullout policy in its 1977 annual report to Congress:

"In Korea, American military presence is the tangible manifestation of our commitment to the security of the Republic of Korea. Our presence helps deter North Korean aggression [sic] toward the South, thus making a vital contribution to the stability of the Northeast Asian region in general.... Our security relationship with Japan requires a continued U.S. Forces presence and access to bases and facilities. These bases, along with the U.S. forces deployed in Korea, visibly reflect U.S. intent, will, and readiness to live up to our commitment.... While South Korea continues to improve its armed forces through a qualitative modernization program, U.S. forces, and logistic support will

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<sup>25</sup> Don Oberdorfer, op. cit., pp. 84-93.

<sup>26</sup> Chung-In Moon, "Influencing Washington: An Analysis of the South Korean Lobby in the United States," in Man-Woo Lee, Ronald D. McLaurin, Chung-In Moon ed., Alliance Under Tension: The Evolution of South Korean-US Relations, Westview Press, 1988, pp. 111-112.

continue to be required to maintain the relative military balance on the peninsula as the ROK progresses toward self-sufficiency.”<sup>27</sup>

In addition, US intelligence estimated that North Korea’s military capabilities were obviously superior to South Korea. Thus, in January 1979, members of the House Committee on Armed Services asked the president to postpone any further pullout of USFK until the full significance of the new intelligence data could be evaluated.<sup>28</sup> Although the Carter pullout plan was suspended because of domestic opposition, it undermined the Korean security mind-set and also deepened distrust between the ROK and the U.S.

The inauguration of the Reagan administration in the United States and of the Chun Doo-Hwan government in South Korea produced a new chance for both countries to recover from their devastated relations. At that time, the Reagan administration, which was facing severe international challenges, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the establishment of an anti-US regime in Iran, pursued an aggressive foreign policy to compete with the enemy countries. Thus, the United States needed strong alliance partners. In the meantime, the Chun government, which was a successor military government after the assassination of President Park, definitely required US help to bolster its legitimacy and to maintain economic growth in order to soothe South Korean public opinion.

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<sup>27</sup> George S. Brown, “Current JCS Theater Appraisals,” Commanders Digest, March 17, 1977, pp. 16-17.

<sup>28</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, “Report on Impact of Intelligence Reassessment on Withdrawal of U.S. Troops from Korea by the Investigation Subcommittee,” (Washington D.C.: USGPO, 1979), p. 1.

As a result of compatible aims, the ROK and the US easily produced close ties. President Reagan agreed to foster South Korea's defense capabilities as well as a USFK presence on the peninsula at the Chun-Reagan summit talks in Washington in February 1981. At the meeting, President Reagan also identified his solid commitment to the security of South Korea. Throughout the 1980's, the ROK-US alliance continued to be strong. The ROK government had enjoyed consistent economic growth thanks to the trusted security guarantee from the United States.

By the end of the Cold War, the ROK-US alliance could not avoid approaching challenges. The termination of the Cold War forced the US to reconsider its foreign policy and strategic aims. Without any clear rival or external threat, the United States lost domestic support for maintaining a heavy defense budget given economic stagnation and trade deficits. To respond to these moods, Congress began to demand the reexamination and alteration of the ROK-US alliance. At last, the Nunn-Warner Amendment to the FY 90 Authorization Bill passed the Senate in July 1989. The Nunn-Warner Amendment authorized the reexamination of USFK structure and mission, steady reduction, and the request to South Korea for increasing its share of running USFK.<sup>29</sup>

In April 1990, the Bush administration addressed the East Asian Strategic Initiative (EASI), which included a plan for USFK reduction. The EASI emphasized the changing role of the US from a "leading" to a "supporting" role and the augmented responsibility of the ROK government for defense in view of South Korea's growing economic strength and military capability. Furthermore, the report outlined a timetable for the withdrawal of

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<sup>29</sup> "Nunn-Warner Amendment to the FY90 Authorization Bill," *New York Times*, July 30, 1989.

USFK. According to the report, in the first phase (1990-1992) the United States would reduce USFK by about 7,000 personnel, including 2,000 Air Force and 5,000 ground forces. During the second phase (1993-1995) an additional pullout of the US Second Infantry Division would be considered, but would depend on the relations between the two Koreas and further improvement in South Korean military capabilities. In the last phase (1996-2000), if the earlier phases were successfully completed, South Korea would assume the leading role in its own defense and only a few US troops would remain to maintain a deterrence on the Korean peninsula.<sup>30</sup> After the first phase, however, the plan was suspended because of increased tensions on the Korean peninsula due to North Korea's nuclear development program.<sup>31</sup>

In the early post-Cold War era, the ROK government had tried to make broad economic, diplomatic, and military relations with the Western and Eastern European countries, Russia, and China. After the successful hosting of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the ROK government of Roh Tae-Woo, created a favorable environment for establishing diplomatic relations with communist and non-aligned nations. President Roh's "North Politics" brought historical diplomatic normalizations with Russia and China in the early 1990's. Also, the ROK government began to expand its arms industry from unilateral dependence on the United States to multilateral sharing with other Western countries such as Germany, England, and France. Furthermore, the ROK government increased its

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<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Looking toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," (Washington D.C.: USGPO, April 1990), pp. 15-17.

<sup>31</sup> Chul-In Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

share of defense costs in maintaining USFK. On a basis of economic growth, the broadened diplomatic activity, and the increased responsibility for self-defense, South Korea was approaching an equal partner status in the alliance.

Although the Cold War has ended in Europe, it still remains in altered form in East Asia. During the early post-Cold War period, North Korea lost unconditional support from its sponsors, Russia and China. To survive in the challenging world order, North Korea had spurred a nuclear weapons program. The nuclear issue had pulled world attention to the Korean peninsula and also produced tensions between the ROK and the US

After the election of President Clinton, the United States again reevaluated its security policy and strategy to fit into the post-Cold War security environment. The first defense plan of the Clinton administration, called the "Report of the Bottom-Up Review" was announced in 1993. The new defense plan suggested a "Win-Win strategy" simultaneously fighting wars in two theaters, undoubtedly in the Middle East and Northeast Asia. On a closer look, the plan also ironically suggested the drawdown of US forces from 1.7 million to 1.4 million.<sup>32</sup> While the Bottom-Up Review contained a US commitment toward Asia, it also created the question "How can the U.S. implement its Win-Win strategy with fewer troops?"

In the meantime, tension on the Korean peninsula drastically increased in 1993 because North Korea refused the IAEA's (International Atomic Energy Agency) request

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<sup>32</sup> Les Aspin, "Report of the Bottom-Up Review," (U.S. Department of Defense, Washington D.C., October 1993).

to inspect North Korean nuclear facilities. Although the nuclear problem was resolved by the Geneva agreement between the US and the DPRK on October 1994, it also generated frictions between the ROK and the US.

The ROK government was isolated during the nuclear talks, which supported North Korean calculations of undermining the ROK-US alliance. Thus, South Korea complained about its backseat role in the negotiations and became concerned about the rapid improvement in Washington-Pyongyang relations. In addition, South Korea worried about the possibility of replacing the existing armistice agreement with a new peace treaty between the US and the DPRK without agreement and consultation with South Korea.<sup>33</sup> In response, the United States guaranteed it had no intention to replace the armistice treaty without South Korea's consensus, no plan to reduce its troops in South Korea, and a prerequisite of real progress in North-South relations before advancing the nuclear agreement.<sup>34</sup>

The North Korean nuclear issue had forced the U.S. to reconsider its security policy toward East Asia. As a result, the United States published "United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region" in February 1995. This report mentioned East Asia as a vital interest of the United States, and that the United States would maintain the current 100,000 troops in Asia without any reduction. It also stressed that the U.S. would keep a consolidated alliance relationship with South Korea and Japan even after the threat

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<sup>33</sup> Nigel Holloway, Jae-Hoon Shim, "Manna From Heaven," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 12, 1995, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Steven Greenhouse, "North Balks, Threatening Korean Pact," *New York Times*, February 9, 1995, p. A7.

from North Korea ceased to exist.<sup>35</sup> In a nutshell, this report showed strong will and intention by the United States to stay engaged in East Asia.

From the mid-1990's, North Korea suffered from several devastating problems, such as the sudden death of its "great leader," Kim Il-Sung, natural disasters, horrible food shortages, and a serious economic downfall. Given these situations, many people predicted a hurried North Korean collapse. Numerous possible scenarios of North Korean collapse developed, such as "hard landing" or "soft landing" scenarios. North Korea, however, has successfully avoided its collapse and may continue to muddle through in the short term.<sup>36</sup>

Since the IMF shock in 1997, the current Kim Dae-Jung government has done its best to help South Korea recover from its economic problems. In light of the South Korean economic downturn, the Kim government has initiated the engagement policy, called "Sunshine Policy".<sup>37</sup> To cope with internal problems, South Korea has been reluctant to see the sudden collapse of North Korea because South Korea would have to carry the cost of Northern recovery. The Clinton administration has adopted the Perry process, which included three phases of mutual threat reduction, improved relations and normalization, and complete dismantlement of the Cold War structure on the Korean

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<sup>35</sup> Department of Defense, "United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region," (Washington D.C.: USGPO, February 1995).

<sup>36</sup> Marcus Noland, "Why North Korea will muddle through," Foreign Affairs, July-August 1997, pp. 105-118.

<sup>37</sup> Oknim Chung, "The Sunshine Policy: An Interim Assessment," Korea and World Affairs, Spring 2000, pp. 5-28.



peninsula.<sup>38</sup> The United States also preferred a soft landing in dealing with the North Korean question. Both the ROK and the US have shared the same strategic purpose in engaging North Korea. At last, these continued engagement policies, which faced conservative opposition, bore fruit with of the first historical summit talks between the two Koreas in June 2000.

Throughout the 1990's, the ROK-US alliance has experienced opportunity and crisis. The post-Cold War era forced the alliance to revise its role in international security environment in East Asia. Furthermore, the United States has picked quarrels with its alliance partner on numerous trade issues. Despite the external and internal challenges, however, the ROK-US alliance has successfully coped with North Korea and remained close and effective.

### **C. NEAR-TERM PROSPECTS FOR US POLICY TOWARD THE ROK-US ALLIANCE**

The termination of the Cold War has led to not only the alteration of US foreign policy, but also to the uncertainty of the strategic environment of East Asia. Although the U.S. won in the long-term competition against the Soviet Union, the United States has lost its historical responsibility. In other words, the United States came to be a "lonely superpower," without an ultimate goal for foreign policy.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the United States looks

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<sup>38</sup> William J. Perry, "Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations," Washington, D.C. October 12, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "The Lonely Superpower," The New Republic, July 1991, pp. 23-27.

like it is wandering "At Sea in a New World."<sup>40</sup> This was true, at least, during the early post-Cold War period. Moreover, the long lasting economic slump of the United States forced the Clinton administration to concentrate its effort on resolving domestic issues rather than foreign policy.

Given this situation, the United States had to reduce large portions of its military forces. The US troop strength went down thirty percent between 1990 and 1995 and the defense budget also decreased from \$304 billion in 1989 to \$278 billion in 1995.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the United States also induced its allies' apprehension by presenting a reduction plan of U.S. troops in South Korea and other Asian Pacific regions. Thus, the dominant concerns of South Korea in the early 1990's was that the United States would isolate itself from Korea and thereby destabilizing the security environment of the Korean peninsula.

Through the North Korean nuclear challenge, however, the United States became aware that its strong leadership was needed to prevent future violence and instability in East Asia. As a result, the White House declared that the United States would protect its national interests through "Engagement and Enlargement," rather than isolation, in dealing with world affairs.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Henry Kissinger, "At Sea in a New World," *Newsweek*, June 6, 1994, pp. 8-10.

<sup>41</sup> Wesley M. Bagby, America's International Relations Since World War I, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 380.

<sup>42</sup> The White House, "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement," (Washington D.C.: USGPO, 1994).

Since then, the United States has enjoyed unprecedented economic success. Thus, most American people began to believe increased global cooperation with American leadership is necessary to solve international problems. Consequently, continuing public support for international involvement encouraged US leaders to play a major role in world affairs.<sup>43</sup> Reflecting America's willingness of engagement in the Asia-Pacific region, the Clinton administration announced that an "Underpinning vision is the essential requirement that America remain engaged in world affairs, to influence the actions of others—friends and foes—who can affect our national well-being....When America neglects the problems of the world, the world often brings its problems to America's doorstep."<sup>44</sup>

The Clinton administration's commitment to continued engagement in the Asian region was very welcome news for the two Koreas. The two Koreas are not yet mature enough to resolve their problems by themselves. They have distrusted each other for such a long time that they can not hug warmly without prejudice. Moreover, the U.S. engagement policy is helpful for South Korea in carrying out its "Sunshine Policy" toward North Korea to achieve peaceful unification. North Korea also can obtain benefits of economic and humanitarian assistance from an American engagement policy, which was impossible under the containment policy. Therefore, it is indispensable for the United States to play a leading role in securing peace in Korea for some time.

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<sup>43</sup> John E. Rielly, "Americans and the World: A Survey at Century's End," Foreign Policy, Spring 1999, pp. 112-113.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen speech to the Commonwealth Club of California, July 21, 1997.

However, there are various challenges for the United States to carry out its leading role in the Korean peninsula. One of the most vigorous challenges would be intervention by the People's Republic of China (PRC). In historic respects, the most important strategic aim of the United States in Asia is to maintain the status quo by means of preventing the emergence of a hostile regional hegemony. The United States has been keenly wary of China's ambition to rise as a dominant power in Asia. As a debatably open secret, the United States is targeting China as a potential enemy in the coming future. The United States and China assume each other as future competitors and even adversaries because of their unharmonious values and interests.<sup>45</sup> The United States Joint Chiefs of Staff issued "Joint Vision 2020" in June 2000. In this report, the JCS ambiguously used the term, "potential adversaries".<sup>46</sup> Arguably, many people believe that the potential adversaries include mainly China and rogue states, such as North Korea and Iraq.

The United States has paid close attention to the Chinese augmented role before, during, and after the North-South summit talks. Interestingly enough, the ROK Minister of Culture, Park Jie-Won, and the DPRK National Defense Commission Chairman, Kim Jong-Il, the leader of North Korea, visited Beijing secretly in April and May before the inter-Korean summit talks to make an accordance with China. The implications for the United States is that China wishes to be the mediator between the two Koreas, a role

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<sup>45</sup> Patrick M. Morgan, "U.S. Extended Deterrence in East Asia," in Tong Whan Park eds., The U.S. and The Two Koreas: A New Triangle, Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1998, p. 53.

<sup>46</sup> US JCS, "Joint Vision 2020," (USGPO, Washington D.C.: June 2000), p.4.

which has been primarily that of the United States. It is significant that the two Koreas view China's increased role in the Korean affairs as natural. The United States was displeased with the fact of non-precoordination by South Korea in the matter of the summit talks<sup>47</sup> and at the same time was concerned the direct North-South dialogue with China would result in the waning of US influence on the Korean peninsula.

In these days, the United States has frequently stressed, more than any other time, its steadfast support for bilateral relationships with South Korea and Japan. The United States has vigorously promoted those bilateral relationships. These countries assume that robust bilateral relationships are needed to protect its own economic, political, and military interests, as well as those for its allies, by guaranteeing peace and stability in East Asia.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast, the ROK government, partly because of ongoing financial crises since the IMF shock in 1997, has started to readjust its security role by making an effort to lessen its dependence on the United States and encouraging regional multilateral networks.<sup>49</sup> South Korea is also seeking ways to be independent from the unilateral relationship with the United States by strengthening foreign relations with the other major

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<sup>47</sup> Scott Snyder, "China-Korea Relations: Beijing at Center Stage or Upstaged By the Two Koreas?" in Ralph A. Cossa, Eun-Jung Cahill Che ed., Comparative Connections: A Quarterly E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations, The Pacific Forum CSIS, July 2000, pp. 82-87.

<sup>48</sup> Larry M. Wortzel, Planning For The Future: The Role of U.S. Forces in Northeast Asian Security, The Heritage Foundation, July 26, 2000, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Edward A. Olsen, "The IMF Crisis: Long Term Impacts on U.S. Security Policy Toward East and Southeast Asia," The Journal of East Asian Affairs, Spring/Summer 2000, pp. 72-73.

powers in East Asia, particularly with China. More importantly, in the wake of the recent anti-American sentiment, South Korean public opinion has raised questions about the role of the United States in Korean affairs. Although the current Kim government has stressed the importance of a consolidated ROK-US alliance for improving inter-Korean relations, it has also realized that allowing any one of the major powers to become a prevalent influence in determining the Korean future would not be a good choice.<sup>50</sup>

In the matter of prospects for US policy toward the ROK-US alliance, the United States will show an enthusiastic desire for consolidating the bilateral ROK-US alliance so as to maintain US leverage in East Asia. Thus, the United States will work to guarantee its interests in Korea contingent on a solid ROK-US alliance relationship. The United States will make an effort to change its role from a leading to a supporting one in the Korean peninsula as attempted during the early post-Cold War period. The biggest challenge for the United States will be encouraging South Korea and neighboring countries to accept continued American predominance in Korean issues.

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<sup>50</sup> John B. Kotch, "Korea's Multinational Diplomacy and U.S.-Korea Relations: The Challenge of Change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," The Journal of East Asian Affairs, Spring/Summer, 2000, p. 158.

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### **III. US POLICY TOWARD NORTH KOREA**

#### **A. THE EVOLUTION OF US-DPRK RELATIONS**

Generally speaking, the United States failed to understand Korea in the wake of World War II. Put simply, the United States policy-makers did not regard Korea as seriously as European countries in terms of its strategic importance. As a result of different perceptions, the United States itself created a small but tenacious and unfriendly regime, namely the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and thereby caused the uncomfortable relations between the two countries.

In historic respects, Russia had recognized the significance of the geopolitical location of Korea since the late nineteenth century, just as Japan had understood it. After all, there was a clash between the Russian and Japanese empires in order to put Korea into each one's sphere of influence. In that struggle, Japan unexpectedly had triumphed over Russia and colonized Korea for the next thirty-five years, from 1910 to 1945.

During the final phase of the Pacific War, the Soviet Union again grasped at a chance for controlling Korea. Thus, it quickly entered into the Pacific theater with ambitious goals vis-à-vis Korea. In particular, Stalin's intention was to obtain warm-water ports on the Korean peninsula, exclude Japan's intervention in Korea, and build a strategic base for the purpose of extending communist power in Northeast Asia. Stalin's view, however, was restricted by President Roosevelt's proposal at the 1945 Yalta Conference for a four power trusteeship in which the United States, Great Britain, China, and the Soviet Union would run Korea.



Unfortunately, there was no meaningful consensus on the structure and direction of a trusteeship and the postwar plan for Korea among the allies. It was a good signal for the Soviets to implement its original plan for occupying Korea.<sup>51</sup>

By the time of termination of the Pacific War, the Soviets had rapidly moved into the northern part of Korea and Manchuria as planned. On the contrary, the United States had no intention to occupy Korea because of less American concern about the geostrategic location of the Korean peninsula and a lack of expertise in Korean affairs. Undoubtedly, the priorities in East Asia for America were China and Japan, specifically in terms of trade-economic interests. American postwar plans for Korea, therefore, were insignificant and short sighted.

Right after the Soviet Union's occupation of northern Korea, American leaders abruptly realized Soviet ambitions to extend their influence in Northeast Asia. As a hurried response without any professional consultation, the United States proposed the thirty-eighth parallel, which was a demarcation line that divided Korea roughly in half.<sup>52</sup>

The United States chose to divide Korea in order "to prevent the occupation of all of Korea by the Soviet forces, which was considered as an expansion of communist control, and to provide for the security of Japan and of US forces during the period of the

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<sup>51</sup> Robert M. Slusser, "Soviet Far Eastern Policy, 1945-50: Stalin's Goals in Korea," in Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye eds., The Origins of the Cold War in Asia, Columbia University Press, 1977, pp. 123-143.

<sup>52</sup> Don Oberdorfer, op. cit., p. 6.

military occupation of Japan.”<sup>53</sup> Finally, under Stalin’s tacit acquiescence of the US proposal, US troops occupied the southern part of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, although Soviet troops had already been stationed in northern Korea.

In the north, the Soviets organized the Provisional People’s Committee for North Korea under the leadership of Kim Il-Sung, who was a young commander of Korean guerrillas against Japanese imperial rule. Kim Il-Sung had begun to systematically prepare for uniting Korea through means of force under Soviet policy direction.

In contrast to the situation in the North, the U.S. military government under General Hodge had suffered not only from southern Korea’s political turbulence, but from its clumsy skill in handling civil affairs in an unfamiliar environment. Hodge and his staff had no experience in the administration of civil affairs and little understanding about Korea. As a result, the lack of preparation for the South in the crucial early days of the military occupation government resulted in a relatively weak Rhee Syng-Man government in comparison to Kim Il-Sung’s regime in the North.

At last, a general election in Korea under UN supervision resulted in the real division of Korea. What emerged in 1948 was two opposed Koreas run by different ideologies. However, the United States officially had not recognized the DPRK’s legitimacy and regarded North Korea as a puppet regime of the Soviets. Therefore, the United States had maintained a “One-Korea” policy and only kept a relationship with

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<sup>53</sup> Leland M. Goodrich, Korea: A Study of US Policy in the United Nations, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1956, pp. 11-12.

South Korea.<sup>54</sup> There was no gesture and motivation for establishing relations between the United States and the DPRK.

From the late 1940's, George Kennan's article in *Foreign Affairs* proposing a historical interpretation of the Soviet Union, had shaped Washington's containment policy toward the communist power. At the graduation ceremony of Harvard University in June, 1947, Secretary of State Marshall addressed the Marshall plan, which planned for the reconstruction and assistance for western European countries to prevent communist expansion.<sup>55</sup> As a counteraction, the Soviets established the Cominform on October, 1947. The "Cold War" between the US and the USSR had begun.

Notably, US containment policy largely tilted toward Europe, rather than Asia. Specifically, Korea's priority for American leaders was "at the bottom of list" due to Washington's paucity of concern regarding North Korea's possible launch of an attack on the South.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the Soviets had kept an eye on China and Korea with a higher priority than the United States. As a result, the asymmetrical application of containment policy brought not only the communist victory in China, but also the rapid military growth of North Korea in support of the Soviet Union and motivation for North Korea to attack South Korea on June 25, 1950.

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<sup>54</sup> Edward A. Olsen, "U.S. Security Policy and the Two Koreas," World Affairs, Spring 2000, p. 150.

<sup>55</sup> Robert D. Schulzinger, U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 209.

<sup>56</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, "Korea in American Politics, Strategy, and Diplomacy, 1945-50," in Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye eds., The Origins of the Cold War in Asia, Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 287.

When the North Koreans ignited the outbreak of the Korean War, the United States saw it as being designed by Stalin as part of an ambitious goal to expand communist power in Northeast Asia and to test American commitment for its allies, particularly West Germany.<sup>57</sup> As turned it out, the Truman administration's immediate decision to dispatch its troops under the UN flag frustrated Kim Il-Sung's militant desire as well as Stalin's vain greed. Through the Korean War experience, profound animosity and bloody relations were generated between the US and the DPRK, not only because of North Korea's miscalculation, but also because of the big powers' reckless judgments.

In a nutshell, the relatively unprepared US role in occupying Korea in contrast to the Soviet one, the different perceptions towards the strategic significance of the Korean peninsula, and the dissonance of Korean nationalist leaders brought the division of Korea and the tragedy of the Korean War. There were two opportunities to unify Korea in the past. First was during the early independence period from Japan. Second was during the Korean War. The United States did not take advantage of these opportunities and produced one of the most uncontrollable regimes in Asia due to its weak willingness to reunify Korea. In the end, conflict and confrontation had evolved and an endless game of hide-and-seek had begun between a police state and a rogue state.

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<sup>57</sup> William R. Keylor, The Twentieth Century World: An International History, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 277.

## **B. US-DPRK RELATIONS: ENDLESS CONFLICTS**

Many observers have difficulties in defining the Korean War. Thus, the Korean War has been portrayed as “The Forgotten War,” “The First Limited War,” and “The Opening Battle of the Cold War.”<sup>58</sup> Whatever the character of the Korean War, however, there is no wonder that the Korean War had a dramatic impact on US policy toward the Korean peninsula, both by transforming a perception of Korea’s importance and by establishing the ROK-US alliance as a priority in US worldwide commitments in the context of containment in East Asia.

In the period following the Korean War, the United States provided tremendous economic and military assistance for South Korean reconstruction on the basic assumption of deterring North Korean aggression by strengthening South Korea’s national capabilities. To be sure, US assistance during the post-Korean War period enabled South Korea to achieve rapid economic growth.

However, only animosity and mistrust was left between the United States and the DPRK as a legacy of the Korean War. Washington regarded North Korea as a puppet regime of the Soviet Union and thereby did not accept North Korea as a legitimate state. Both countries defined each other as an “enemy state.” In line with its containment

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<sup>58</sup> Joseph Alexander, “Remembering the Forgotten War,” Naval History, April 2000. p 20.

strategy, the United States had cracked down with legal and economic sanctions which originally started in the early Korean War period.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, North Korea rehabilitated very quickly from the war's destruction. During the 1950's, North Korean agricultural production increased by an average of 10 percent a year, and the Gross Industrial Product grew by nearly three times in 1956 compared to 1953.<sup>60</sup> Undoubtedly, the USSR and the PRC provided economic aid for North Korea to overcome economic difficulty. Notably, China provided a large amount of manpower to work on the recovery projects and supported North Korea by propagandizing the threat from the US and the ROK. Consequently, North Korea achieved remarkable success in rebuilding its national capabilities.<sup>61</sup>

In the early 1960's, North Korea had paid attention to the South Korean environment, which was characterized by strong student movements for unification along with harsh condemnation against the dictatorial and corrupt Rhee Syng-Man regime. When the possibility of insurgent turmoil in the South was crushed by General Park's

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<sup>59</sup> Nicholas Eberstadt, "U.S.-North Korea Economic Relations: Indications from North Korea's Past Trade Performance," in Tong Whan Park ed., The U.S. and The Two Koreas: A New Triangle, Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1998, p. 119.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Hart-Landsberg, Korea: Division, Reunification, and U.S. Foreign Policy, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1998, p. 147.

<sup>61</sup> Jon Halliday, "The Economies of North and South Korea," in John Sullivan, Roberta Foss ed., Two Koreas—One Future?, University Press of America, 1987, p. 27.

military coup, North Korea strongly denounced Park's military coup and at the same time grew concerned about "a threat from the South."<sup>62</sup>

In response to the creation of a strong anti-communist government in Seoul, Kim Il-Sung hurriedly signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union and China in July 1961, in effect consolidating their anti-Washington and anti-Seoul alignment. However, the friendly PRC-North Korea-Soviet Union trilateral relationship faced a serious challenge stemming from the conflicting views between the USSR and the PRC over the interpretation of communist ideology. Pyongyang at first showed a cautious neutral stance toward that dispute. As the Sino-Soviet conflict worsened, North Korea found it difficult to support both sides. When Premier Nikita Khrushchev began to initiate an appeasement mood with the United States, North Korea severely condemned Moscow's revisionism. Needless to say, the accusation resulted in the Soviet's sharp cut off of assistance for North Korea.<sup>63</sup> The relatively close relations between Beijing and Pyongyang did not last long due to their disagreement on a strategy to counter US escalation in Vietnam. In other words, the Chinese rejection of North Korea's proposal for establishing joint Sino-Soviet action to support North Vietnam increased tension in their relations.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Rinn-Sup Shinn, "North Korean Policy Toward South Korea," in Young C. Kim ed., Major Powers And Korea, Research Institute on Korean Affairs, 1973, pp. 89-90.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>64</sup> Il-Pyong Kim, "The Major Powers and the Korean Triangle," in John Sullivan, Roberta Foss ed., Two Koreas—One Future?, University Press of America, 1987, p. 123.

In the ongoing struggle between revisionism and dogmatism, North Korea became aware of the necessity of ideological and military independence from the Communist big brothers. As a result of the Sino-Soviet rift, North Korea introduced “Juche Thought,” which has been a basic principle in the DPRK’s external and internal behaviors. To North Korea, Juche means not only ideological self-reliance, but also the capability to act independently.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Kim Il-Sung made an effort to bolster North Korea’s military strength through a “Four Point Military Line,” and economic power through the “7-Year Plan (1961-67).”

While North Korea was suffering from the decreasing military and economic aid from its allies, South Korea was enjoying massive assistance from its ally. In particular, President Park’s decision to normalize relations with Japan and to participate in the Vietnam War enabled South Korea to boost its economic and military power. North Korea, given the threat of a solid ROK-US alliance, adopted the use of belligerent terrorism against the ROK and the US in the late 1960’s.

In 1968, North Korea infiltrated South Korea with a thirty-one member Commando team in a failed attempt to assassinate President Park, along with over one hundred guerrillas attempting to overthrow the South. North Korea also seized a US spy ship, the *Pueblo*, in the same year. The following year, it shot down a US EC-121 reconnaissance aircraft. Unintendedly, these militant terror actions created a repercussion of solidifying

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<sup>65</sup> Jounghwon Alexander Kim, Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945-1972, Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 199.



the ROK-US alliance and simultaneously increasing the tension in US-DPRK relations, rather than creating a rift in the ROK-US relations.<sup>66</sup>

While the Sino-Soviet conflict in the 1960's created great anxiety and insecurity to North Korea, it provided an opportunity for the North Korean leadership to think and act independently from China and the Soviet Union on a basis of "Juche Thought". As a result, Washington began to consider Pyongyang's growing independence more carefully.

During the 1970's, the United States and the DPRK experienced twists and turns in their relations. President Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972 to end the Cold War with China and his Nixon Doctrine, brought a big challenge to North Korea as well as an opportunity for it to carry out a new strategy toward the United States. In other words, the US-Chinese détente created a slight rift between China and North Korea. North Koreans had consistently maintained an anti-American stance and were against American "imperialism" since the Korean War. Therefore, North Korean leaders were shocked by the scene of the Chinese leader shaking hands with the American leader.

On the one hand, the détente mood encouraged North Korea to make a new ploy of peaceful gestures toward the US and the ROK. The hidden agenda of Pyongyang clearly was to bring about disintegration within the ROK-US alliance and a complete pullout of USFK from South Korea, which had been a core aim of North Korea since the Korean peninsula's division.

North Korea was bearing in mind the growing domestic complaints in the United States over the stalemate of the Vietnam War, which could force the Nixon

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<sup>66</sup> Rinn-Sup Shinn, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

administration to weaken its commitment toward South Korea. In line with this hopeful view, North Korea initiated inter-Korea talks in 1971, such as the Red Cross talks aimed at reunifying separated families during the Korean War. North Korea also made an attempt to open a line of communication with Washington by sending signals in the form of letters and proposed direct negotiations with the US, excluding the South Korean government, on the issue of replacing the Armistice agreement with a permanent peace agreement.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, North Korea began to reconsolidate relations with China. Kim Il-Sung's visit to Beijing in April 1975 not only obtained China's firm commitment to North Korea, but also reaffirmed China's support for the DPRK as the only sovereign state on the Korean peninsula. However, Pyongyang's expectations were not achieved. The United States' posture and emphasis on keeping a solid alliance with South Korea was not changed fundamentally. Moreover, Washington proposed cross-recognition and for the two Koreas to join the UN. These efforts basically supported Seoul's standpoint and frustrated Pyongyang's intention to undermine ROK-US bilateral relations by isolating South Korea from the international community.<sup>68</sup>

Although the Nixon administration had withdrawn approximately 20,000 troops from the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in South Korea, it compensated by providing increased economic aid, arms technology for military modernization, and American credibility. The ROK and the United States agreed to initiate Team Spirit in 1976, a major national scale

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<sup>67</sup> Sung-Hack, Kang, Iago and Cassandra: The United States and Korea in the Age of Air Power (Iago wa Cassandra: Hangkongreyk Sidaewi Miguk kwa Hanguk), Oreum Publishing (Oreum Chulpansa), 1997, p. 688.

<sup>68</sup> Sung-Hack, Kang, op. cit., p. 689.

of joint exercise to prepare against North Korea's possible reinvasion. Even after the collapse of South Vietnam, the Vietnam Syndrome's impact on the Korean peninsula was not as serious as North Korea had anticipated.

Given these circumstance, North Korea's hope of withdrawing USFK and generating disharmony in the ROK-US alliance was shattered. North Korea returned to a hardcore anti-American stance. Along with this antagonistic attitude, North Korean soldiers ax-murdered two US officers who were working in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in August 1976. North Korea's barbarous behavior brought about a strong reaction by Washington, including a massive mobilization and consequently resulted in more obstacles for Pyongyang's overall strategy.

When President Jimmy Carter was inaugurated, North Korea again caught an opportunity to alleviate tensions in US-DPRK relations. In fact, North Korea was keenly keeping an eye on candidate Carter's campaign pledge aimed at the complete pullout of USFK. It was absolutely welcome news for Kim Il-Sung who believed that this would be the best chance for him to reunify the two Koreas under his leadership.<sup>69</sup>

As it happened, President Carter's plan was reversed due to severe domestic and external opposition. The North Korean leaders again felt frustration and ignited acts of terrorism during the 1980's, following in line with psychologists' "Frustration-Aggression theory."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Don, Oberdorfer, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>70</sup> Frustration-Aggression theory assumes that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression, John Dollard, Neal E. Miller, Leonard W. Doob, O.H.

The inauguration of the Reagan administration was good news for the South, while it was terrible news for the North. The United States turned its foreign policy toward a more active direction in order to compete with the Soviet Union. The Reagan administration designed a "horizontal escalation" policy which intended to weaken the Soviet Union by pressuring Soviet peripheral interests.<sup>71</sup> To achieve these goals, the United States needed strong alliance relationships throughout the world. As a result, President Reagan enthusiastically held ROK-US summit talks in February 1981.

In South Korea, meanwhile, a new Chun Doo-Hwan regime emerged by military coup and sought to obtain legitimacy from Washington. While the Chun government was having difficulties of political instability from of its lack of legitimacy, it enjoyed unprecedented economic growth at almost a double-digit rate. This became known as "the miracle of the Han-river." Given these unfavorable circumstances, North Korea responded with violent acts of terrorism, such as a bomb attack in Burma in 1983 where President Chun and government officials were scheduled to visit, but which fortunately failed.

In the mid-1980's, Washington launched a "smile diplomacy," which intended to open Pyongyang as a part of a modest initiative. US-DPRK diplomatic contacts, however, remained limited in a narrow scale of talks and thereby progressed very little in official

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Mowrer, Robert R. Sears, Frustration and Aggression, Yale University Press, 1939, pp. 1-26.

<sup>71</sup> Martin Hart-Landsberg, op. cit., p. 159.

and private contacts.<sup>72</sup> The United States insisted that Seoul should participate in any contacts between Washington and Pyongyang regarding Korean issues, whereas the DPRK did not agree at all with Washington's proposal.

After the successful hosting of the 1986 Asian Games, the following Roh Tae-Woo government in South Korea announced the "nordpolitik policy," designed to defuse North Korea's threat by establishing ties with both communist and non-aligned states in light of long-term objectives. South Korea succeeded in its "bean counting" goal and obtained world recognition through the successful hosting of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, in spite of North Korea's bombing of a Korean Airline flight in 1987. In conjunction with Seoul's new effort, Washington proposed a "modest initiative" in 1988 that demonstrated a willingness to engage North Korea instead of maintaining a containment policy. In this regard, North Korean officials began to visit Washington. In response to Seoul and Washington's efforts, Pyongyang claimed the discontinuation of Team Spirit as a evidence of the ROK's and the United States' sincerity.<sup>73</sup> As a result of Pyongyang's reluctant and distrust, there was no remarkable improvement in the US-DPRK relations, while North Korea had become increasingly isolated from the international community in the face of the post-Cold War era.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989 and the following termination of the Cold War reshaped the world order and forced states to reassess their basic assumptions on

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<sup>72</sup> Kenneth C. Quinones, "North Korea: From Containment to Engagement," in Dae-Sook Suh and Chae-Jin Lee ed., North Korea After Kim Il Sung, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p. 105.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-107.

national interests and goals. Undoubtedly, the demise of the Cold War was a big challenge to North Korea. North Korea's future appeared even more uncertain. However, North Korea was prepared to cope with the post-Cold War era by means of a hidden card, namely the nuclear bomb.

In the early 1990's, North Korea was suspected of constructing a nuclear facility at Yongbyun. North Korea denied a nuclear safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which was a mandatory requirement for a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, US satellites found possible evidence of the existence of a North Korean nuclear reprocessing plant. There was also information on North Korea's nuclear capability coming from different sources, such as North Korean defectors and the KGB.<sup>75</sup>

Tensions in US-DPRK relations were dramatically growing. The initial response of Washington, however, was prudent and thereby implemented a "carrot-and-stick" approach. As a stick, the United States provided advanced military equipment, such as Abrams battle tanks, Cobra helicopters, and F-16 fighters to the ROK military. More importantly, the ROK and the US agreed to expand the scale of the Team Spirit Joint Exercise. As a carrot, the US and the ROK showed a soft gesture to Pyongyang by making the suggestion of joining the UN with South Korea in order to bring isolated North Korea into the international community. In addition, President George Bush announced that the United States would remove all tactical nuclear weapons from

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<sup>74</sup> Martin Hart-Landsberg, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>75</sup> Sharif Shuja, "The DPRK's Nuclear Program and Policy: Continuities, Changes, and Challenges," Korea Observer, Winter 1997, p. 673.

worldwide US bases. Right after President Bush's address, President Roh also declared non-nuclearization on the Korean peninsula. As a result, North Korea agreed to the "Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, Exchange, and Cooperation" on December 1991.<sup>76</sup>

Pyongyang finally accepted the Nuclear Safeguard Agreement with the IAEA in 1992. Thus, the IAEA could inspect the suspicious nuclear facilities at Yongbyun which it did from May 1992 to January 1993. As a reward, Seoul and Washington agreed to cancel the 1992 Team Spirit Joint Exercise, the first year it had ever been cancelled.<sup>77</sup>

When the two other suspicious nuclear waste sites were revealed by US satellites, the IAEA quickly asked North Korea to accept special inspections on those sites. However, the North refused the IAEA's proposal and even warned that it would withdraw from the NPT. Tensions increased to an extremely high level and the US and the ROK responded by resuming the Team Spirit Exercise and deploying PATRIOT missiles in South Korea.<sup>78</sup> More seriously, the United States even planned on a preemptive strike on the North Korean nuclear facilities and imposed economic sanctions on North Korea.<sup>79</sup> As a result of these hardcore responses by Washington, the sudden death of North Korean

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<sup>76</sup> Kenneth C. Quinones, op. cit., pp. 107-109.

<sup>77</sup> Martin Hart-Landsberg, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>78</sup> James Cotton, "The North Korea/United States Nuclear Accord: Background and Consequences," *Korea Observer*, Autumn 1995, p. 325.

<sup>79</sup> Jamie McIntyre, "Washington was on the Brink of War with North Korea 5 Years Ago," CNN, October 4, 1999, from <http://www.cnn.com/us/9910/04/korea.brink>, accessed September 15, 2000.

leader, Kim Il-Sung, and former-President Jimmy Carter's negotiation with Pyongyang, North Korea signed the Geneva agreement in October 1994.

Through nuclear gambling with the United States, North Korea gained more than originally intended.<sup>80</sup> North Korea gained economic aid, the promise of easing economic sanctions, and two modern light-water reactors. Pyongyang undermined the ROK-US alliance by excluding Seoul at the negotiation table and also identified the efficiency of "asymmetric threat"<sup>81</sup> against the United States and the ROK. Most importantly, the nuclear issue enabled North Korea to pave the way for constructing full-fledged diplomatic relations with the United States. Consequently, there was steady improvement in US-DPRK relations during the 1990's.

Notwithstanding its successful use of a nuclear threat, the worsening economic situation in North Korea forced Pyongyang to ask for humanitarian aid. In fact, the North Korean economy severely shrunk, with negative GDP growth since the late 1980's. Furthermore, the horrific food and energy shortages brought millions of deaths and created enormous refugee problem. The uncertain stability in Pyongyang's politics, rooted in the process of power transition from Kim Il-Sung to his successor, Kim Jong-Il, raised controversial debates on North Korea's possible collapse.

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<sup>80</sup> For analysis of North Korea's motivations for nuclear program, see Tong-Whan Park, "The Deadly Game of Survival: Pyongyang's Nuclear Politics in the Changing Inter-Korean Relationship," Korea Observer, Autumn 1993, pp. 400-402.

<sup>81</sup> Young-Jeh Kim, "North Korea's Nuclear Program: Problems and Prospects," Korea Observer, Autumn 1994, p. 319.



Given North Korea's vulnerability and resulting predictability, the Clinton administration adopted an engagement policy, modeled on US "constructive engagement" policy toward South Africa so as to prevent North Korea's sudden collapse or last ditch conflict with South Korea. In March 1996, Washington and Seoul proposed four-party talks, which would include the US, China, and the two Koreas as actors, aimed at replacing the current armistice agreement with a peace agreement. Despite Pyongyang's negative attitude toward the four-party talks, it had no choice but to accept the talks due to its desperate need for economic and food aid from the outside. Consequently, North Korea participated in the four-party talks in Geneva in December 1997.<sup>82</sup>

In 1997, the economic turmoil in South Korea forced the Kim Dae-Jung government to introduce its "Sunshine Policy," the South Korean version of engagement with the North. In effect, Seoul was reluctant to see the hard landing of the North during the South's economic recovery because it could possibly result in the collapse of both Koreas. Therefore, South Korea has encouraged North Korea's economy by boosting inter-Korean economic cooperation and multilateral approaches for the purpose of shaping a solid foundation for peaceful unification.

Despite Washington and Seoul's engagement attempts, North Korea's test launching of the Taepo-dong I missile in 1998, infiltrating a submarine and semi-underwater boat into the South, the naval clash in the West Sea (Yellow Sea) in 1999, and ongoing deadlock of the four-party talks allowed conservatives in Washington and Seoul to raise

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<sup>82</sup> Chuck Downs, Over the Line, The AEI Press, 1999, p. 267.

sharp criticism of the engagement approach and also to harden their line toward Pyongyang. In particular, North Korea's missile challenge provided a strong rationale for the United States and Japan to investigate National Missile Defense (NMD) and Theater Missile Defense (TMD) systems.

Since the outbreak of North Korea's nuclear issue, Washington's engagement policy toward Pyongyang has been challenged by conservatives, who strongly advocate that North Korea's nuclear question should be resolved only by forceful means, if necessary, aerial attack on nuclear facilities in North Korea.<sup>83</sup> Specifically, the series of Pyongyang's provocative movements in 1998 and 1999 provided a strong rationale for hard-liners to reassert the containment policy and the discontinuation of engagement policies toward North Korea. In their view, North Korea is a rogue regime that is threatening the United States with many dangerous weapons, such as WMD and missiles, and is cheating on any agreements with Washington. Therefore, they believe that the solution is to contain the regime until it either concedes or collapse.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast, moderates argue that such a hardcore stance would back North Korea into a corner and could result in war in the Korean peninsula. Thus, they suggest that "it would be less dangerous if Pyongyang could be induced to forgo its isolation and nuclear

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<sup>83</sup> John H. Cushman, Military Options in Korea's Enigma, Berkeley, Nautilus Institute, 1994.

<sup>84</sup> Victor D. Cha, "The Rationale For Enhanced Engagement of North Korea: After the Perry Policy Review," Asian Survey, November-December, 1999, pp. 845-846.

ambition in exchange for the respectability, legitimacy, and numerous other benefits of membership in the international community.”<sup>85</sup>

Fortunately, the Clinton administration has still maintained its engagement policy toward North Korea in spite of the domestic critics. In mid 2000, Washington suggested a senior-level official meeting and hinted at a possibility of lifting the Trade with the Enemy Act sanctions against Pyongyang in accordance with North Korea’s moratorium on the testing of long-range ballistic missiles in the Berlin agreement.<sup>86</sup> As a result of continuous application of the engagement policy by both the United States and the ROK, North Korea at last has begun to unlock its door and to seek meaningful change in ROK-US-DPRK trilateral relations.

### **C. NEAR-TERM PROSPECTS FOR US-DPRK RELATION**

In 2000, North Korea has been in active contact with the international community. North Korea not only normalized relations with Italy and Australia during 2000, but also began to expand relations with Britain, France, Belgium, Canada, and other European and Asia-Pacific countries. Although those countries continuously demand the improvement

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<sup>85</sup> Kenneth C. Quinones, “North Korea: From Containment to Engagement,” in Dae-Sook Suh, Chae-Jin Lee ed., North Korea After Kim Il-Sung, Rienner, 1998, p. 107.

<sup>86</sup> The Office of International Information Programs, US Department of State, “State Department Fact Sheet on Sanctions Against North Korea,” June 19, 2000.

of human rights and a reliable commitment on the nonproliferation issue by North Korea, there has been remarkable progress in North Korea's foreign relations.<sup>87</sup>

In particular, the normalization with the United States and Japan has been a core goal of Pyongyang's diplomatic efforts. In addition, North Korea seeks to gain economic aid by paving the way for international banking loans to stabilize domestic troubles. More importantly, North Korea can shape a favorable environment for its international relations by integrating itself into the international community.<sup>88</sup>

However, there still exist obstacles for North Korea to overcome. In the matter of DPRK-Japan normalization, Pyongyang repeated its demands for Japan to apologize and pay compensation for its brutal colonial rule on the Korean peninsula during the early twentieth century. On the other hand, Tokyo demands the return of Japanese kidnapped by North Korean agents and wants to get assurances on Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs. Normalization between these two countries appears uncertain and complicated due to not only the threat of military confrontation, but also to deep distrust and animosity.

In contrast, the possibility of steps forward towards normalization in US-DPRK relations has better prospects than the DPRK-Japan situation. In fact, Pyongyang has been trying to end its animosity with Washington since the late 1980's. Currently, the

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<sup>87</sup> Agence France Presse Editorial, "France Sets Out Conditions For Changing Relations With North Korea," *Agence France Presse*, September 21, 2000.

<sup>88</sup> Joel Wit, "Clinton and North Korea: Past, Present, and Future," March 01, 2000, from [http://www.nautilus.org/for\\_a/security/ooo1A\\_Lee.html](http://www.nautilus.org/for_a/security/ooo1A_Lee.html), accessed March 02, 2000.

North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Il, presented an enthusiastic desire for establishing diplomatic relations with the United States. Kim said, “ The U.S. is putting a cap of a terrorist nation<sup>89</sup> on us. As soon as they remove it, we would open ties with the U.S.—even tomorrow.”<sup>90</sup>

Since the North-South summit talks, Washington has been trying to find answers to the question of “Whether the regime is changing for real-or simply trying to milk maximum concessions from the international community before reverting to its unpredictably dangerous self.”<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, Washington has also been trying to regain its lost driver’s seat in dealing with Korean affairs. In this regard, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with DPRK Foreign Minister Paek Nam-Sun at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum in Bangkok on July 28, 2000.<sup>92</sup> In effect, the United States superficially welcomed the North-South summit talks, while it voiced concerns about its outside role and China’s rising influence.

In the near-term, there is no doubt that “ if only North Korea gives up its nuclear and long-range missile programs, the United States will normalize diplomatic relations with

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<sup>89</sup> The United States put North Korea on the list of terrorist states shortly after the 1987 bombing of a South Korean airliner in the skies near Myanmar.

<sup>90</sup> Kyong-Hwa Seok, “North Korea Issues New Offer For US Relations,” *The Associated Press*, August 13, 2000.

<sup>91</sup> Laxmi Nakarmi, “Kim Jong Il’s New Direction,” *Asiaweek*, September 15, 2000.

<sup>92</sup> Doug Struck, “US Hustling to a New Beat in Asia,” *The Washington Post*, July 28, 2000, p. A1.

the North.”<sup>93</sup> To obtain its policy goal, Washington will make an effort to embody substantial arrangements for Pyongyang. Particularly, the Clinton administration would want to see a Korean foreign policy success before President Clinton leave office amidst a collapsed peace process in the Middle East. In this regard, North Korea can provide an honorable retirement ceremony for a foreign policy team in the Clinton government.

In Pyongyang, Kim Jong-Il will have no choice but to accept Washington’s proposals so as to gain further economic benefits and ensure long-term political stability. North Korea currently is eager to make any reliable relationships with the United States under upcoming uncertain circumstance in the next administration. Thus, it is inevitable for Pyongyang to try to obtain concrete promises from Washington in the matter of its survival as a regime and to gain economic benefits as much as it can during Clinton’s presidency. As a result of their consensus, both countries rapidly exchanged the highest official visits ever between the two countries by US Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright in Pyongyang from October 23, 2000 to October 25, 2000 and Vice Marshal Jo Myong-Rok in Washington from October 8, 2000 to October 12, 2000 and even discussed the possibility of President Clinton’s visit to North Korea before leaving office.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *The Korea Herald*, February 24, 2000. US Former Defense Secretary William Perry’ address at Radio Free Asia on February 18, 2000.

<sup>94</sup> Robert J. Fouser, “Albright in Pyongyang: Why Now?” *The Korea Herald*, October 31, 2000.

To be sure, the United States and North Korea accomplished salient progress in their relations during 2000. Presumably, diplomatic normalization and the establishment of a peace structure in US-DPRK relations might come true sooner or later.

There are still challenging variables. In mid 2000, the House Policy Committee, chaired by Representative Christopher Cox (Republican-California), harshly condemned the Clinton-Gore engagement policy toward North Korea as a “truly mad policy” and strongly demanded a reexamination of Washington’s policy toward Pyongyang.<sup>95</sup> Although this criticism is mostly political propaganda against the Democratic Party in during an election period, it implies a possible shift in US policy from softcore to hardcore in dealing with North Korea. There would be some change in the methodological approach toward the DPRK. However, it is expected that there would be no dramatic change in Washington’s stance in the next administration.

In Seoul, some observers regard the normalization of US-DPRK relations as a harmful factor that would undermine the ROK-US bilateral relationship. The normalization of US-DPRK relations, however, would not be a zero-sum game. In Pyongyang, some leaders would exclude South Korea at the negotiation table between the US and the DPRK. North Korea should recognize that there would be no notable progress in US-DPRK relations without the improvement in ROK-DPRK relations. Therefore, diplomatic ties and a peace agreement between Washington and Pyongyang

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<sup>95</sup> US House of Representatives Policy Committee Report to the Chairman, “Clinton-Gore Aid to North Korea Supports Kim Jong-Il’s Million-Man Army Enough Plutonium to Build 65 Nuclear Bombs A Year,” July 27, 2000.

should be done along with signing a peace treaty and meaningful promotion in Seoul-Pyongyang relations.

Once the diplomatic ties between the US and the DPRK are achieved, the normalization will not only bring rapid progress in DPRK-Japan relations as well as a number of other nations, but also contribute to shaping the foundation for the peaceful unification on the Korea peninsula. It is too soon to conclude that Pyongyang has obviously decided to open its door to the outside world. However, it is fair to say that remarkable and constructive changes are going on this long isolated state. Therefore, it is time for the United States to end the long enmity with the DPRK, to continue engagement, and to build rapprochement.



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#### **IV. KOREAN UNIFICATION:IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ROK-US ALLIANCE**

##### **A. THE CHANGING UNIFICATION ENVIRONMENT ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA**

During the last decade of the twentieth century, the Korean peninsula has remained Asia's only intact legacy of the Cold War. Even after termination of the Cold War, little had changed with the situation in Korea. Rather, tension and confrontation between the two Koreas increased. Thus, peaceful Korean unification appeared to be an intangible possibility.

However, the historic North-South summit talks on June 2000 dramatically changed not only inter-Korean relations, but also the East Asian security order. It is simply a landmark event in contemporary Korean history. In particular, the unprecedented summit talks generated an optimistic hope for peaceful Korean unification to the people of both Koreas. In the past, there were two major efforts to deal with the unification issue between the North and the South. In 1972, the two Koreas agreed to the July 4 Joint Communiqué which was the first inter-Korean agreement on reunification. More recently, in 1991 Seoul and Pyongyang signed the Basic Accord on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation. These two efforts had limitations, such as the Cold War external environment and an unstable domestic situation in North Korea, and thus were inefficient in producing meaningful outcomes.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Kihl-Jae Ryoo, "An Evaluation of the Inter-Korean Summit," Korea Focus, July-August, 2000, p. 16.

But the June 2000 summit talks were fundamentally different from the previous ones. First of all, the leadership of North and South Korea could build personal confidence and develop trust with each other for the first time. Second, the summit talks touched on all the major issues. Third, the two leaders shared similar views on the unification process. Finally, the summit talks produced the Joint Declaration which demonstrates real progress in the implementation of agreements.<sup>97</sup>

Many remarkable movements for improving inter-Korean relations have occurred throughout various fields since the summit talks. One of the most salient changes in North-South relations is the rapid improvement of economic cooperation and exchanges. Article 4 of the Joint Declaration stressed that “The North and the South have agreed to pursue the balanced development of a national economy through economic cooperation and solidify their mutual trust through the revitalization of cooperation and exchanges in social, cultural, sports, health, and environmental as well as other fields.”<sup>98</sup> Based on this principle, the two Koreas agreed to reconnect the Gyeong-ui railroad between Seoul and Sinuiju, currently crossing the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). In addition, the two Koreas are discussing several other related issues, such as the avoidance of double taxation, investment guarantees, settlement-remittance, and arbitration processes so as to facilitate economic cooperation.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Jong-Seok Lee, “Achievements and Future Tasks of North-South Summitry,” Korea Focus, July-August 2000, pp. 2-10.

<sup>98</sup> The North-South Joint Declaration, June 15, 2000, Article 4.

<sup>99</sup> Kihl-Jae Ryoo, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Undoubtedly, North Korea is not an attractive market for foreign investment and trade because of its vulnerable domestic infrastructure, an inappropriate financial and legal system, and unstable political situation. It is clear, however, that North Korea improved its external and internal environments for foreign investment and trade through making a positive image for itself in the summit talks. Although South Korea will expand economic investment and assistance, the amount will not be enough to cope with the large number of large-scale projects. For example, about \$9 billion will be required for short-term projects for reconstructing North Korean infrastructure, whereas South Korea's financial capability to invest in the North amounts to less than \$2 billion.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, it is definitely necessary to bring money from the international community. In that sense, the summit talks contributed to shaping a favorable environment for North Korea in the eyes of the international financial institutions and major countries that have the ability to resolve North Korea's economic difficulties.

In other areas, 100 people from the North and another 100 from the South who had been separated during the Korean War warmly hugged each other on August 15, 2000 which was also Korean Independence Day. Constructive dialogue for further meetings is also ongoing between Pyongyang and Seoul. In addition, North and South Korean athletes marched together under a blue Korean peninsula flag at the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. Many cultural and sport exchanges have been actively pursued in order to enhance inter-Korean relations. These events have actual

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

ramifications as well as symbolic significance.<sup>101</sup> In other words, these movements not only motivate Korean people's strong desire for reunification, but also make Korean people feel a deep ethno-national sentiment. These motivations and feelings will positively affect the process of unification and remain even after unification of the Korean peninsula.

Despite South Korea's enthusiastic efforts to produce results on security and military issues, there has been little progress in these fields. It is also hard to find any notable agreement in the Joint Declaration on reducing military tension in Korea. Some observers, therefore, argue that the threat of war can not be dissipated without a meaningful agreement by the two Koreas on reducing military tension in Korea.<sup>102</sup> Despite a huge agenda of discussion, the recent inter-Korean Defense Minister talks between ROK Defense Minister Cho Seong-tae and DPRK Minister Kim Il-Chol in September 2000, only ended with a small agreement on supporting the reconstruction of a railroad and plans to hold a second meeting on November.<sup>103</sup> However, it should be evaluated in the light that two hostile military leaders shook hands with each other and negotiated for the first time. Although results of the first meeting did not meet South Korea's hopes, it is expected that gradual progress will be achieved in the following

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<sup>101</sup> John Burton, "Koreas to march under one flag," *Financial Times*, September 10, 2000.

<sup>102</sup> Yong-Sup Han, "Has the Threat of War Really Been Eliminated?" *Korea Focus*, July-August, 2000, pp. 100-103.

<sup>103</sup> Jae-Suk Yoo, "Korean Defense Chiefs Meet," *The Associated Press*, September 25, 2000.

meetings. North Korea has no choice but to provide some security incentives for South Korea in order to gain continuous economic aid.

The most remarkable achievement in the summit talks was reaching an accord on the unification formulas between the two Koreas. In other words, the two Koreas have recognized for the first time that the South's "confederation" formula and the North's "federal" formula are basically a similar solution.<sup>104</sup> In the past, each of the two Koreas would propose unacceptable unification formulas to the other side. As a result, it has always been the most difficult agenda item to deal with between the North and the South. This time, however, the two Koreas shared a common concept on the initial stage of proceeding toward unification.<sup>105</sup> It was significant progress in the implementation of unification.

There is no doubt that the Summit Talks were a great success. South Korea could shape a favorable unification environment and at the same time establish a peaceful mood on the Korean peninsula, while North Korea could begin rehabilitation of its economy and bring positive international attention for its reconciliation and cooperation. As a result, President Kim Dae-Jung has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2000 resulting from his great sacrifices and contributions to easing the Cold War era tension on the divided Korean peninsula.<sup>106</sup> By winning the prize, President Kim gained a solid legitimacy for his "Sunshine Policy" as well as an enhanced support from the public for

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<sup>104</sup> The North-South Joint Declaration, June 15, 2000, Article 2.

<sup>105</sup> Jong-Seok Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> Tim Larimer, "Well Worth the Effort," *Time Asia*, October 23, 2000.

engagement with North Korea. It is expected that the prize's impact will not only encourage President Kim to maintain his stance on engaging Pyongyang, but also speed up the current process of inter-Korean cooperation. However, some challenges have emerged in the wake of these successes.

In South Korea, the conservatives' voice have begun to gradually increase. They are disgusted with the current exchanges between Pyongyang and Seoul and warn of the counter products of Kim Dae-Jung's excessive engagement policy. For example, former President Kim Young-Sam strongly denounced that "President Kim Dae-Jung made too many concessions and agreed to give economic aid to North Korea in a bid to win the Nobel Peace Prize."<sup>107</sup> Meanwhile, he has led the campaign against the tentatively scheduled Kim Jong-Il visit to Seoul.

Since the Summit Talks, they have become concerned about the tendency of ideological confusion in South Korea stemming from North Korea's new image, which has become known as "Kim Jong-Il shock." They are now getting more impatient and demanding a hardened Seoul attitude toward Pyongyang. Specifically, they have raised a question of "Why does only Seoul have to make concessions?" In other words, they believe that the North and the South relations should develop along a "Tit-for-Tat" principle. In line with this principle, they assert that any further economic aid should be linked to North Korea's genuine actions, such as the repatriation of prisoners of war and kidnapped fishermen. Besides, some conservatives also strongly argue that Kim Jong-Il

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<sup>107</sup> The Korea Times Editorial, "Kim DJ's Peace Formula," *The Korea Times*, October 17, 2000.

should apologize for North Korea's war crimes and terrorism on South Korea before his tentatively planned visit to Seoul.<sup>108</sup>

One other more serious problem is that the South Korean public has slowly begun to complain about President Kim's neglect on domestic issues. Even under the continuing economic turmoil, the Kim government provided around \$650 million for North Korea last year in pursuit of its "Sunshine policy." In fact, South Korea is still recovering from its post-'97 economic turmoil. Many small and large businesses are struggling to solve their own problems. Given these situations, the tax-payers are concerned about the increasing economic burden on them coming from President Kim's engagement policy. Thus, the public demands President Kim's attention to resolving problems at home.<sup>109</sup>

Even if these challenges become severe obstacles in the future, the South Korean government should make an effort to maintain the current détente mood. In order to obtain this objective, South Korea needs not only to expand inter-Korean cooperation and exchanges, but also to consolidate international support for its policy toward North Korea. By doing so, it will bring fundamental change in the North Korean system and the North Korean people's mind-set, and at the same time save future unification economic costs and efforts.

Korean unification is not a short-term process, but a long-term one. President Kim said that the reunification of Korea may take 20 or 30 years in spite of the breakthrough

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<sup>108</sup> Moon-Hong Song, "Mutualism For North Korea," (Daebuk Sanghojoowi), *New Dong-A (Shin Dong-A)*, October 2000.

<sup>109</sup> Nayan Chanda, Jae-Hoon Shim, "Trouble on the Tracks," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 28, 2000, pp. 14-16.



summit talks.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, it is necessary for both Koreas to be more patient. A step-by-step approach, rather than a hasty process, will be required to resolve unification questions. It is clear that melting one of the last glaciers of the Cold War will be a long process. The current situation on the Korean peninsula is better than it has been at any other time since WW II. The most important thing, therefore, is for the two Koreas' to maintain a sincere attitude toward inter-Korean cooperation and reconciliation in spite of upcoming challenges. In line with this attitude, both Koreas should preferentially establish a permanent inter-Korean peace system in the near-term in order to reduce ongoing military tensions and confrontation. It will foster inter-Korean relations as well as a peaceful unification environment.

## **B. THE IMPACTS OF KOREAN UNIFICATION ON THE SECURITY ORDER IN NORTHEAST ASIA**

Throughout its history, Korea has confronted intervention by its powerful neighbors due to its geostrategic location. From the thirteenth century to the nineteenth century, Korea existed as a subordinate state to the Chinese empire. Japan rapidly emerged as the most powerful state in Northeast Asia as a consequence of victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. After World War Two, the United States and the Soviet Union replaced Japan's leadership on the Korean peninsula

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<sup>110</sup> John Burton, "Korean Unification may take 30 years," *Financial Times*, July 17, 2000.

during the Cold War. In retrospect, the fate of Korea was doomed by the competition of foreign nations or by the control of one predominant nation.<sup>111</sup>

In light of this historical lesson, an interesting question is easily raised on what will be the impacts of Korean unification on the Northeast Asian security order. Undoubtedly, Korean unification will bring a totally new dynamic to the region. Thus, the major powers interested in Korean affairs are keenly keeping an eye on the trends on the Korean peninsula, particularly since the June 2000 summit talks between the two Koreas.

To be sure, during the Cold War a divided Korea played a major role in keeping stability in Northeast Asia. In other words, Korea's division helped both China and Japan agree to a balance of power designed by America's military engagement in the region. China could prevent Japan from remilitarization. In turn, Japan could enjoy economic prosperity and low cost defense under the protection of the United States. Therefore, the Korean peninsula was a useful buffer zone between them.<sup>112</sup> However, Korean unification will create uncertainty in the region and thereby force the major powers to sketch a new outline in their assumptions toward Northeast Asia.

Reinforced by heavy military investments and rapidly growing Chinese economic power, China could emerge as the new regional hegemony, as well as a major global power in the twenty-first century. Korean unification will bring simultaneous

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<sup>111</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1973, p. 177.

<sup>112</sup> Edward A. Olsen, "Korea's Reunification: Implications for the U.S.-ROK Alliance," in Thomas H. Henriken and Kyongsoo Lho eds., One Korea?: Challenges and Prospects for Reunification, Hoover Institution Press, 1994, p. 119.

opportunities and challenges to China. Beijing can groom Unified Korea as a countering state against Japan's ambition to be the regional leader. China seems to have confidence that Unified Korea will be more tilted toward Beijing, rather than Tokyo, because of historical and cultural affinity between China and Korea. Furthermore, Chinese leaders are expecting that Korean unification would positively motivate the Chinese people's strong desire for their own unification between China and Taiwan.<sup>113</sup>

On the other hand, China fears a Unified Korea under American influence. China truly does not want to see a unified Korea being used as means of American containment against Beijing. Thus, China will not accept a solidified Unified Korea-US alliance. Furthermore, the demise of the DPRK will result in the loss of a major bargaining chip for China in being able to influence Korean affairs.<sup>114</sup> Korean unification could also result in political instability in the Chinese Communist Party. The demise of a communist regime in Pyongyang will record the first collapse of an East Asian communist state and can increase the public's suspicion toward the leadership of the CCP.<sup>115</sup>

In economic terms, a Unified Korea could emerge as a strong rival to China. To be sure, a Unified Korea will pursue international investment in Korea and make efforts to improve its domestic situation. In this regard, some Koreans who are pursuing a stronger unified economy would deny Chinese access to the Korean market, technology, and

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<sup>113</sup> Fei-Ling, Wang, "Joining the major powers for the status quo: China's views and policy on Korean reunification," Pacific Affairs, Summer 1999, p.170.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>115</sup> Robert Dujarric, Korea: Security Pivot in Northeast Asia, Hudson Institute, 1998, p. 65.

capital investment. As a result, economic competition and discordance between Unified Korea and China could be inevitable. On the one hand, an economically strong Unified Korea could be more valuable to China. Undoubtedly, China has benefited from economic relations with South Korea since diplomatic normalization in 1989. South Korean investment in and trade with China have helped Chinese economic modernization. Specifically, South Korea has enabled China to counter the dominance of Japanese sources by diversifying its sources of foreign technology and capital investment.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, China can expect a synergy effect from a growing Korean economy. In order to continue economic development and maintain a balance of power with the United States and Japan, China obviously will try to enhance its influence on the Korean peninsula, but it will move very cautiously.

Japan is not well prepared to cope with the post-Korean unification circumstance. Japan has been reluctant to fully support Korean unification. The status quo on Korea has been good for Japan's economic and security interests. There is little doubt that Korean unification will provide some peace to Japan by removing North Korea's nuclear and missile threat to Japan's security. Furthermore, a Unified Korea can not shift to an anti-Japanese posture without jeopardizing Japanese economic aid and investment.<sup>117</sup> A

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<sup>116</sup> George T. Yu, "China's Response to Changing Developments on the Korean peninsula," in Tong-Whan Park ed., The US and the Two Koreas: A New Triangle, Rienner, 1998, pp. 261-262.

<sup>117</sup> Michael J. Finnegan, "The Security Strategy of Unified Korea and the Security Relations of Northeast Asia," The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis, Winter 1999, p. 141.

Unified Korea also can reduce tension in Sino-Japanese relations by serving as a buffer state between the two as it had done before unification.

Nevertheless, it seems likely that Korean unification will create a more unfavorable environment to Japan. First of all, the rise of a strong unified Korea, which has profound enmity against Japan, would be an undesirable consequence to Japan. Although unified Korea's economy can not be stronger than Japan's, it could become much more powerful in military strength. While a unified Korea could not seriously threaten Japan in terms of air and naval power, it could intimidate Tokyo with military capabilities, such as Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and ballistic missiles, possibly inherited from the former North Korea. In particular, the stalemated territorial dispute over Tokdo (Takeshima in Japanese) island could suddenly become inflamed, given the historic anti-Japanese sentiment of the Korean people, and result in military conflict.<sup>118</sup>

One other stake for Japan in Korean unification will be the possible American withdrawal from Northeast Asia. Korean unification will have great influence not just for the ROK-US alliance, but for the US-Japan alliance. In other words, Japan's greatest concern is the repercussions of a diminished ROK-US alliance on the US-Japan alliance. It is possibly expected that a post-unification ROK-US alliance could not be as solid as before the reunification period and thereby would involve partial or massive reduction of US forces from the Korean peninsula. This would negatively affect the American military presence in Japan.<sup>119</sup> The power vacuum in Northeast Asia would break a stable balance

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<sup>118</sup> Robert Dujarric, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>119</sup> Morihiro Hosokawa, "Are US Troops Needed?" Foreign Affairs, July-August, 1998, pp. 2-5.

of power and create severe military competition among the major powers, specifically between China and Japan. Therefore, the worst scenario for Japan is to race alone without America's security commitment against unfriendly neighboring states that could have deep anger toward Japan.

For Japan, Korean unification could become a very challenging issue. However, in spite of negative factors, Korean unification could be a desirable consequence as long as a Unified Korea maintains a democratic system and an open market economy. In addition, Japan's constructive role in the process of the peaceful Korean unification will bring Japan's positive image to Korean people and thereby result in shaping a Unified Korea that is friendly to Tokyo.<sup>120</sup>

For Russia, Korean unification would provide more benefits than costs. There is no doubt that Russian influence on the Korean peninsula has remarkably dwindled since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. For example, Russia's role has been marginalized at the Four-Party talks, which only includes the two Koreas, China, and the United States as actors in handling Korean issues. Through political maneuvering by President Vladimir Putin, Russia recently has been trying to regain its influence on Korea for the sake of guaranteeing its economic and strategic interests in a post-unification era. As long as Russia can play a constructive role in the process of unification, Korean unification clearly could provide an opportunity for Moscow to rejoin the mainstream of Northeast Asia as a major Asian power.

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<sup>120</sup> Masao Okonogi, "The North Korean Crisis and Japan's Choice," in Won-Mo Dong ed., The Two Koreas and the United States, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2000, pp. 127-129.

Currently, economic revitalization is the core goal of Russian policy. Thus, Russia has had good reason to prefer a divided Korea due to the economic benefits from the South and strategic relations with the North. To be sure, Unified Korea will spend its money on domestic projects just as with Germany's experience. Therefore, Russia can not expect an enhanced economic partnership with Unified Korea. However, Unified Korea could enhance economic prosperity for Vladivostok, Siberia, and the Maritime Province by connecting them by railway to warm water ports.<sup>121</sup>

In the light of strategic interests, Korean unification poses a two-faced opportunity to Russia. If Unified Korea would strengthen its alliance with the United States and Japan, it could make Sino-Russian relations closer. Moreover, both Russia and China would cooperate in dealing with any regional issues through this consolidated strategic partnership.<sup>122</sup> Korean unification could result in improved Sino-Russian relations from ambiguous partners to trustful companions. Notably, this would generate a new confrontation between a Sino-Russian cluster and Unified Korea-US-Japan domains.

In contrast, if a weakened Unified Korea-US relationship leads to an estranged US-Japan alliance, it will not be in Russian national interests at all. Undoubtedly, a militarily dependent Japan has contributed to the lessening Russian concerns over the rearmament of Japan and maintaining the status quo of the territorial problems inherited from past Russo-Japanese relations. Moscow's hope, therefore, is to see Tokyo well integrated into

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<sup>121</sup> Edward A. Olsen, "An American Perspective on Evolving Russo-Korean Rapprochement," in Il Yung, Chung ed., Korea and Russia Toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, The Sejong Institute, 1992, p. 380.

<sup>122</sup> Michael J. Finnegan, op. cit., p. 142.

America's security system.<sup>123</sup> Consequently, there are no sufficient reasons for Russia to be enthusiastic about Korean unification, but, unlike China and Japan, Russia does not need to fear Korean unification.

Under such complicated calculations of the major powers on Korean unification, what will be a Unified Korea's role in Northeast Asia? Should it again invite the major powers' greedy competition in the Korean peninsula just as in the late nineteenth century? To be sure, a Unified Korea would seek a state of autonomous, self-sufficient, and actively engaged national security and economic prosperity. In order to obtain these national objectives, a Unified Korea should pursue prudence toward its neighboring countries.

It is not difficult to imagine that a Unified Korea could become a mediation state, linking the continental and the maritime states together thanks to its geo-economical location. A Unified Korea could be a center of trade by providing maritime bases and the starting point of a Silk Road railway. It would bring economic prosperity for Korea itself as well as for regional economic development.<sup>124</sup> In addition, a Unified Korea could play an integral role in Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific Rim not only for an economic community, but also for social, cultural, and security cooperation. The most important

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<sup>123</sup> Alexei D. Bogaturov, "Russia in Northeast Asia: Setting a New Agenda," Korea and World Affairs, Summer 1993, p. 312.

<sup>124</sup> Dang Kim, "The Korean Peninsula is Now running toward the World," (Hanbandonun Jikum Sekyero Dalinda), *Weekly Dong-A (Jugan Dong-A)*, September 14, 2000.



thing is that unless Unified Korea provides comfort to the major powers, it will not be able to carry out its role in the region.<sup>125</sup>

Therefore, a Unified Korea should seek to develop a good neighbor policy in pursuit of the balanced integral role it seeks for itself in the region, rather than emphasizing an exaggerated Korean peninsula-centric policy.

### **C. THE IMPACTS OF KOREAN UNIFICATION ON THE ROK-US ALLIANCE**

To date, the ROK-US alliance has been regarded as a crucial underpinning of US strategy in Northeast Asia. Specifically, the core element of the alliance, US forces in Korea, have successfully fulfilled their role as a stabilizer during the Cold War and post-Cold War period. The major powers have consented to America's vital role in stabilizing the region. In recent days, however, the inter-Korean summit has apparently alleviated military tension on the Korean peninsula and thereby raised questions about the future role of the ROK-US alliance in spite of concerns about prematurely discussing those issues.

As stated above, Korean unification will bring about a tremendous impact upon the region. Under rapidly emerging changes, therefore, even the United States can not avoid the new challenges. Some analysts foresee that only the United States with the assistance of its allies will be able to ensure peace and stability in East Asia. Hence, they argue that

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<sup>125</sup> Young-Jeh Kim, "New Directions for a Unified Korea in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Korea Observer, Spring 2000, pp. 7-21.

the consolidated bilateral alliance will be an important means to support Washington's posture.<sup>126</sup> However, it will not be easy to address how the ROK-US alliance will be able to smoothly handle the challenges of maintaining its solid bilateral alliance relationship.

Once permanent peace settles down on the Korean peninsula, it will require a rethinking of the justification of both the Korea-US alliance and US military presence on Korea just like "In a Unified Korea, many will ask, why would there be any further need for the alliance, let alone our military forces?"<sup>127</sup> The ROK-US alliance has played its role on a basis of deterring an opponent's threat. In other words, the threats from the Soviet Union and North Korea have provided strong legitimacy to the alliance's existence. Even in a post-Cold War era, North Korea's continuing military threat has enabled the alliance to strengthen its relations in spite of its remaining integral frictions.

When we assume that North Korea is no longer a threat, however, it will become a difficult problem for the alliance to explain its strategic goal. According to Ole R. Holsti and Stephen M. Walt, "the external threat is the primary source of both alliance formation and alliance cohesion."<sup>128</sup> In turn, it means that if the external threat disappeared, the alliance will face the risk of disintegration. In the sense of this theory, can the ROK-US alliance sustain its relations in a strong manner without any existing threat? It is a difficult question because any conclusion will be based on speculation.

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<sup>126</sup> Robert Dujarric, op. cit., p. 114-123.

<sup>127</sup> Michael H. Armacost, Kenneth B. Pyle, Japan and the Unification of Korea: Challenges for US Policy Coordination, The National Bureau of Asian Research, 1999, p. 36.

<sup>128</sup> Ole R. Holsti, op. cit., p. 28, Stephen M. Walt, The Origins of Alliance, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987, pp. 21-22.

Even given the continuing threat from the North, the current conciliatory mood in South Korea has produced a public debate on the withdrawal of US troops from Korea and altering the status of USFK.<sup>129</sup> Although both Seoul and Washington have reassured each other that the ROK-US alliance will remain strong during the pre and post-unification periods, they will undoubtedly again face political pressure to justify the alliance's further consolidation without an existing threat from Pyongyang.

Potential security threats to a Unified Korea include China's strategic purpose to bring Korea into its sphere of influence by limiting Korea's autonomy, a remilitarized or expansionist Japan, and the most dangerous possibility of conflicts in Sino-Japanese or Sino-American relations.<sup>130</sup> In order to cope with these potential threats, the current alliance's strategic nature and role should be redefined. It is difficult to imagine that the Unified Korea-US alliance would target any one of the major powers in East Asia as a possible enemy. Unified Korea would prefer balanced and modest relations with neighboring states over one-sided dependent relations in dealing with threats.

The United States can not envision Japan as a threatening factor as long as Washington sees the US-Japan alliance as the most important linchpin in its strategy for the East Asian-Pacific region. While the United States assumes China as a potential enemy, the real threat to a unified Korea may come from Japan rather than from China.

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<sup>129</sup> See, for example, Don Kirk, "A North Korea Shift On Opposing US Troops?" *The International Herald Tribune*, August 10, 2000; and Yong-Bae Shin, "US Can Discuss Troop Status If Threat Reduced, Envoy Says," *The Korea Herald*, June 29, 2000.

<sup>130</sup> Michael J. Finnegan, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

As a result, Unified Korea and the United States can not share a homogeneous strategic aim in defining external threats to the alliance in a post-unification environment.

In general, America's leading role in the Asia-Pacific region is accepted not only just for the region, but also for American national interests. Although the center of gravity of US security still remains "Eurocentric," policy makers and military planners have begun to shift their attention toward Asia in an assumption that Asia will be the next major theater of US military and economic competition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>131</sup>

In line with the shift of strategic focus, the United States has strengthened its alliance relationship with Japan via the April 1996 Joint Security Declaration and the 1997 revised Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation. The United States further emphasized updating its alliance partnerships with other Asian-Pacific allies.<sup>132</sup> The United States has also made an attempt to build a national missile defense system (NMD) and theater missile defense system (TMD) for the purpose of protecting itself and its allies from the missile threat of certain rogue states. Although President Clinton has passed a decision on the deployment of those systems to the next administration, the attempt unnecessarily provoked and increased tensions with China and Russia.

What is more important is that these American steps in Asia have created a strong sense of uncertainty about the future security environment, especially for Beijing and Moscow. Therefore, the emergence of a consolidated Unified Korea-US military alliance

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<sup>131</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, "The Pentagon's Shift in Focus," *The Washington Post National Weekly*, June 12, 2000, pp. 6-8.

<sup>132</sup> Department of Defense, "United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region," (Washington D.C.:USGPO, 1998).

definitely will be an unfavorable consequence to them. In particular, China and Russia seriously fear the presence of US troops across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel after Korean unification. Robert Jervis points out that “the drive for security will produce aggressive actions if the state either requires a very high sense of security or feels menaced by the very presence of other strong states.”<sup>133</sup> The historic lesson that clearly proved the above proposition was the march of US troops to the Yalu river, the borderline between China and the Korean peninsula, during the Korean War which resulted in China’s entry into the war even though American intention was not malicious toward Beijing.

In the light of history, unexpected aggressive actions by China or Russia could be produced in an unsettling situation during the early post-unification period. After all, the regional concerns toward a further solidification of the ROK-US alliance will be a major constraint in sustaining a fully effective alliance after Korean unification.

One of the most challenging issues for Unified Korea and the United States to handle in the post-unification era could be growing Korean nationalism along with antagonism against foreign powers. During the Western imperial period, the most difficult agenda for imperial forces to deal with was nationalism in the colonial states. In Korea, nationalism lost its way in the early Cold War period due to the severe confrontation of two hostile ideologies, communism and democracy. Since Korea’s division, communism and democracy have usurped Korean nationalism, but have served as useful political tools to maintain internal cohesion in the different systems.

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<sup>133</sup> Robert Jervis, Perception and Misperception in International Politics, Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 64.

When the role of political ideology diminishes, nationalism will undoubtedly take its place in the role of uniting the Korean people. In terms of the radical nature of nationalism, Korean nationalists will strongly push for the withdrawal of foreign forces from the peninsula and demand independent self-defense. Nationalists are quick to mention Korea's unfortunate experience of foreign states' irresponsible intervention in Korean affairs. For example, they believe that the United States has generated the division of the peninsula by exploiting Korea as a "pawn in pursuing Cold War strategic objectives related to primarily to Japan."<sup>134</sup> They therefore will believe that it is too naïve of an idea that "A state's integrity must be maintained entirely by others,"<sup>135</sup> and will motivate Korean people to support the build up of a strong Korean military.

More seriously, there exists irrational nationalism among the younger generation, who has witnessed the counter-products of American presence, stemming from the asymmetrical Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). For example, thousands of protesting students and South Korean non-governmental organizations (NGOs) rallied in Seoul during 2000, demanding the pullout of American troops from South Korea and revision of the SOFA.<sup>136</sup> When today's younger generation grows to become the leaders of a Unified Korea, they will retain the deep resentment and require a fundamental change of the alliance.

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<sup>134</sup> Selig S. Harrison, "The United States and the Future of Korea," in Won-Mo Dong ed., The Two Koreas and the United States, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2000, p. 216.

<sup>135</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 375.

<sup>136</sup> Jin-Soo Kim, "Time to End the Unequal ROK-US Relations," (Ijenun Kueneyahal Bulpyongdunghan Han-Mi Kwangae), *Weekly Dong-A (Jugan Dong-A)*, July 27, 2000.

In response to this nationalist's movement in Korea, the US government may also face domestic pressure to bring its soldiers back home. Furthermore, Washington may have a hard time to persuade the Congress, which is very sensitive to public opinion, of the importance of maintaining a solid alliance with a Unified Korea. Thus, the pullout of US troops from Korea after unification is plausible just as it was with the Philippines.

Currently anti-US sentiment is held by a very small minority, mainly among thousands of leftist students and NGOs in Korea. It is necessary, though, to consider that hostility against the United States with strong nationalism could have explosive impacts on the continuation of the alliance. The impacts could not only bring about the complete or partial pullout of American troops, but also undermine the alliance itself. Therefore, Korean nationalism should be the predominant factor for a Unified Korea and the United States to consider in planning for the future alliance picture.

In the end, Korean unification will lead to a flexible and limited role of the Korea-US alliance as a consequence of diluting the strategic goals of the alliance, regional concerns toward the further consolidation of the alliance, and growing Korean nationalism with antagonism against foreign powers.

## V. THE FUTURE OF THE KOREA-US ALLIANCE

Despite its successful experience, the Korea-US alliance will undoubtedly confront internal and external challenges that will require modification of the nature and role of the alliance after Korean unification. While South Korea and the United States have reaffirmed that the ROK-US alliance will play a pivotal role in maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula after Korean unification, both countries need to prepare for the future in the context of an uncertain environment in the post-unification era.

As one possible scenario for the future of the Korea-US alliance, we can assume a political alliance model. The political alliance envisions that a Unified Korea would be able to fulfill full responsibility for its own defense. Thus, US commitments to Korea would not be military, but mostly political. In this regard, there would be no significant US military presence in Korea and there would no longer be an appreciable security relationship between Korea and the United States.<sup>137</sup> Such an alliance in name only could undermine the security coordination as well as the strategic partnership of both countries. Presumably, the United States would pursue a strengthened US-Japan alliance so as to compensate for the diluted alliance with a Unified Korea. As to Korean affairs, therefore, the United States could play only a limited role. If the political alliance continues without any complementary efforts, it consequently could lead to the end of bilateral alliance relations between a Unified Korea and the United States.

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<sup>137</sup> Jonathan D. Pollack, Young-Koo Cha, A New Alliance For the Next Century: The Future of US-Korean Security Cooperation, RAND, 1995, pp. 32-33.



Is a political alliance the only possible end state of the Korea-US alliance? For a Unified Korea, it is risky to compete with the powerful neighboring states without America's security commitment. It is normally a better strategy to get a friend's help to defend against foes. Although a Unified Korea could inherit strong military capabilities from the two Koreas, a Unified Korea would not be able to fully support its own self-defense and economic interests. For example, the protection of a Unified Korea's sea lines of communications (SLOCs) will rely on the US navy, unless a Unified Korea develops a robust blue-water navy or leans towards the Chinese navy.

Also, the United States will not benefit from the breakdown of the alliance with a Unified Korea. First of all, the United States apparently will not want to see a Unified Korea's pro-China posture. It directly could result in the loss of a strategic supporter in dealing with Chinese rising hegemonic power. Undoubtedly, Beijing will attempt to increase its influence on a Unified Korea, while Washington will prevent a Unified Korea from going into China's sphere. Therefore, it is possible to imagine the unnecessary confrontations of Sino-American relations stemming from the demise of the Korea-US alliance. In addition, the United States could have difficulty in managing the rise of Korean-Japanese animosity and Sino-Japanese enmity which could emerge by ending the Korea-US alliance. Additionally, the demise of the Korea-US alliance could automatically fuel a skeptical view on the future of the US-Japan alliance. As a result, it is inevitable that the United States will want to maintain an alliance relationship with a Unified Korea. One thing is clear that both a Unified Korea and the United States will definitely need to retain their alliance relationships for guarantying their various individual interests.

As another model, a Unified Korea-US-Japan trilateral alliance could be pursued to compensate for a declining Korea-US alliance. To be sure, the triangular cooperation had played a bulwark role in deterring the communist threat during the Cold War. During the post-Cold War period, furthermore, the security and diplomatic coordination in the trilateral relations has been effective in handling North Korean issues. For example, the ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation has been demonstrated in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) to cope with the North Korean nuclear threat. Furthermore, the three countries reaffirmed that Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo will continue to work closely and cooperate in easing tension on the Korean peninsula at the meeting among the three countries' foreign ministers on October 25, 2000 in Seoul.<sup>138</sup> This cooperation movement has taken place not only among government levels, but also through private activity, such as the second track security dialogue among research institutes. It appears the most likely form of a "quasi-alliance triangle." Therefore, it is possible to anticipate optimistically that the triangular alliance could emerge despite historical antagonism in Korea-Japan relations.<sup>139</sup>

However, the triangular alliance model has some problems. Without any specific external menace, the triangular alignment could not gain proper rationale for its establishment and existence. It will be difficult to promote the full-fledged triangle alliance, unless the alliance designates a clear enemy in its strategic goal. In light of this

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<sup>138</sup> Yong-Bae Shin, "Three Allies to Reinforce North Korea Stance: In response to Pyongyang's Moves to Improve Relations with US," *The Korea Herald*, October 26, 2000.

<sup>139</sup> Victor D. Cha, Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle, Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 213-229.

view, the triangular alliance will hear strong concerns from China and Russia. They have acquiesced to triangular security cooperation on the condition that it mainly would deal with North Korean questions. Hence, China and Russia will regard a triangular alliance as a strategic means of the United States to contain them. There is no doubt that the emergence of a triangular alliance in the post-Korean unification period would provoke competing regional powers and consequently result in a new Cold War type confrontation between Unified Korea-US-Japan vs. China-Russia. This new conflict among major powers is not going to be a desirable consequence for a Unified Korea, which would seek good neighbor policy for the purpose of decreasing the potential tension on the Korean peninsula. So, a Unified Korea will show less enthusiasm toward a triangular alliance as long as Unified Korea would maintain friendly relationships with China and Russia. Despite the neutralizing role of the United States in the triangular alliance, furthermore, it will take a long time for Korea and Japan to look at each other with a friendly attitude. Therefore, the triangular alliance is not plausible as a replacement to compensate for a weakened Korea-US alliance.

One of the most salient phenomena in the post-Cold War international security environment is the emergence of the United States as the sole global superpower, resulting in "Pax Americana." The termination of the Cold War allowed the United States, backed by strong military and economic power, to unilaterally lead a world order. Through the Gulf War and economic downfall in early 1990's, however, the United States began to realize the limitations of its ability to resolve problems in world affairs. In other words, the United States is no longer in a position to unilaterally influence world politics and economy.

Meanwhile, economic cooperation and interdependence have been growing throughout the Asia-Pacific region. In order to respond to the need for region-wide structures to foster economic cooperation and interdependence, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) was founded in 1989. APEC has played a leading role in accommodating the diversity of the region's economies and promoting economic cooperation among the regional countries.

In contrast to the deep economic integration, political and security integration have remained undeveloped. Although the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which brings together the Association of Southeast Asian Nations with other regional states, has provided a framework for handling regional security issues, it has primarily focused on resolving small disputes among countries and not on seeking a substantial security mechanism for consultations within the region.

Another multilateral effort is the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD). The CSCAP was established in 1993 to bring security cooperation in the Asia Pacific. The NEACD was established in the same year to promote mutual understanding and confidence through unofficial dialogue among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States. On the Korean peninsula, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and the Four-Party talks between the two Koreas, China, and the

United States were created with the purpose of overall resolution of North Korean questions.<sup>140</sup>

Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go before those multilateral security structures can be viewed as a success due to its double-edged nature. Multilateral security systems basically assume resolution is achieved through mutual cooperation and understanding. Therefore, a long time and much effort will be needed to reach final consensus. For this reason, multilateral forums can not effectively cope with abrupt crises. For example, there were no multilateral structures in place capable of resolving the North Korean crisis in 1994 and the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1996. Northeast Asia has an inherent obstacle to the improvement of multilateral security mechanism. In other words, the mutual distrust among regional countries, which have experienced war, imperial conquest, and recent economic and military competition, could be a major limitation for multilateralism in the region. Besides, cultural diversity, increasing economic gaps among states, and long lasting legacies of the Cold War alliances make it difficult to set up a multilateral security structure.

Above all, whether multilateralism can work well in Northeast Asia will be mostly contingent on the compatibility of views of the major actors. The United States support for multilateralism is less enthusiastic than Korea's desire. Although the United States also recognizes the importance of multilateral mechanisms in handling Northeast Asian security problems, it has still sought the resolution of troublesome issues in the region

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<sup>140</sup> Ralph A. Cossa, "Prospects for Northeast Asia Multilateral Security Cooperation," presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Northeast Asia Defense Forum on February 25-26, 1999, held in Seoul, pp.1-2.

through the faithful bilateral network. Accordingly, the United States does not have any strong desire for construction of a multilateral security system in which it will not be a dominant leader.

Japan has traditionally shared similar security interests with the United States. Japan sees the US-Japan alliance as a bedrock for its security as well as economic development. Even though Japan has recently demonstrated an increasing willingness to participate in multilateral forums, such as hosting the 1995 APEC forum and expressing enthusiasm for PKO activity, so as to enhance its leadership in regional affairs. Japan believes that the most important means to cope with its security problems is not a multilateral system, but the existing US-Japan bilateral alliance.

In China, multilateral security mechanisms have been regarded as a means of containing Chinese influence and sovereignty. Thus, China has been opposed to most multilateral dialogues without its involvement. In particular, China has been unwilling to see its internal issues, such as controversial territorial disputes, human rights, and democracy, become internationalized through multilateral forums. Therefore, China will be unlikely to support a Northeast Asian multilateral dialogue when it touches on sensitive domestic issues.<sup>141</sup>

Despite these complications and limitations, multilateral security mechanisms in Northeast Asia will be a significant means for ensuring peace and stability in the context of an uncertain post-Korean unification era. First of all, a multilateral system can be used

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<sup>141</sup> Kyu-Dok Hong, "Prospects for Multilateral Security Dialogue in the Northeast Asia," presented at the seminar for Northeast Asian Multilateral Security System on September 15, 1993, held by Korea Research Institute For Strategy in Seoul, pp. 73-75.

as confidence-building measures aimed at “avoiding, rather than reacting to, crises or conflicts.”<sup>142</sup> The future security threats will come from not only conventional threats, but also from various new emerging threats, such as environmental damage, economic friction, competition for natural resources, territorial disputes, and religious conflicts. In this regard, multilateral systems can provide a venue for resolving those problems by means of promoting a spirit of cooperation.

Multilateral mechanisms can also facilitate greater interaction among regional countries. By bring interaction among regional states, a multilateral security system can serve as a check and balance and form a balance of power in the region. It can improve a transparency regarding Chinese military capabilities and intentions, as well as an increased Japanese security role and rearmament. At the same time, it can provide means for Russia to become involved in Northeast Asian issues.<sup>143</sup>

Multilateral systems could allow the United States to maintain its regional influence with low costs. In other words, it can provide an opportunity for the United States to reduce its overseas forces by resolving the “burden-sharing” question with regional countries. Despite the reduction of American forces, Washington can present its voice regarding regional affairs by active participation in multilateral dialogues.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ralph A. Cossa, “Bilateralism versus Multilateralism: An American Perspective,” The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis, Winter 1996, p. 23.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>144</sup> Young-Sun Song, “Prospects for a New Asia-Pacific Multilateral Security Arrangement,” The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis, Summer 1993, p. 191.

Notably, multilateral structures can prevent an emergence of a neo-isolationist United States by forcing American engagement in Northeast Asian affairs. In fact, the major powers have shared a similar view on America's stabilizing and balancing role in Northeast Asia. American indifference in regional affairs, therefore, will not be beneficial at all for them to maintain peaceful balance in the region. Thus, multilateral structures could be a useful means to retain an American military presence in Asia and its continuing involvement in the Northeast Asia.<sup>145</sup> In the case of the pullout of American troops from Korea, a multilateral dialogue could also provide a negotiation table to induce arms reduction, rather than an arms race in the region, through alleviating mutual fears of a power vacuum.

Multilateral mechanisms would allow a Unified Korea to ensure its autonomy and independence and to expand its regional role to some extent. A Unified Korea can use multilateral structures as important vehicles for promoting long-term peace and stability and balancing against regional powers. If multilateral mechanisms serve a constructive role in the process of peaceful Korean unification, not only would a major regional issue be resolved, but also hope would be generated for successful running of multilateralism in Northeast Asia. As a consequence of this effectiveness, multilateral arrangements will be an important means to compensate for a weakened Korea-US alliance's role in the post-Korean unification era.

Northeast Asian countries have become more interdependent in terms of economic and security integration. East Asian economic groupings have quickly increased to deal

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<sup>145</sup> Edward A. Olsen, David Winterford, "Asian Multilateralism: Implications for US Policy," The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis, Summer 1994, p. 37.



with future Asian economic crises since the Asian economic turmoil in the mid-1990's. For example, the Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) and ASEAN Free-Trade Area (AFTA) are beginning to evolve.<sup>146</sup> Although economic integration and establishment of a regional economic bloc paradoxically could bring about suspicions and frictions among the regional countries, the increasing economic interdependence among regional countries will create a favorable environment for bringing about political and security integration in the region because such economic interdependence is not consistent with bilateralism in political and security affairs.

Without a bilateral security alliance with the United States, however, a Unified Korea can not ensure its complete security. In turn, ending the alliance with a Unified Korea will be an unfavorable for the United States to effectively fulfill its tasks in the region. Therefore, both countries should maintain some bilateral security relations even if the alliance becomes more loose and flexible. Under such a rupture in a Unified Korea-US bilateral alliance, multilateral security systems could be the best option for bolstering security stability as well as economic prosperity in Northeast Asia after Korean unification. After all, the future Korea-US alliance should progress toward a mixed model of flexible bilateralism and extended multilateral mechanisms, rather than only strengthened bilateralism.

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<sup>146</sup> Fred Bergsten, "East Asian Regionalism: Towards a Tripartite World," *The Economist*, July 15, 2000, pp. 23-26.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Throughout the life-span of the ROK-US alliance, both South Korea and the United States have experienced twists and turns in trying to maintain a strong relationship. Nevertheless, the ROK-US alliance can be described as an overwhelmingly successful model for bilateral alliances. There is no question that the ROK-US alliance has played a crucial role in deterring North Korea's threat as well as providing for regional stability. Notably, US troops in South Korea and general US military commitments have fully fulfilled its function of preventing war on the Korean peninsula. Needless to say, that function should be continued until permanent peace and stability exist in Korea.

The continuous engagement policy of both the ROK and the United States, backed by a solid ROK-US alliance, greatly contributed to bringing about the historical North-South summit talks in Pyongyang in June 2000. Although the two Koreas still face many obstacles in achieving peaceful unification, they have finally begun the remarkable process. In other words, there has been genuine progress in inter-Korean relations, from hostile confrontation to reconciliation and cooperation.

Once Korea is unified peacefully under South Korea's leadership, Korean unification will bring a new change in the Northeast Asian security environment. Thus, the status quo in the region would no longer be maintained in the post-unification period. The Northeast Asian countries would have to readjust their strategic concepts to the new dynamic circumstances. Undoubtedly, Korean unification will also bring into question the necessity of the Korea-US alliance.

Without existing external threats, the alliance will not retain its legitimacy as it had during tense Cold War hostilities. Furthermore, regional concerns about the further strengthening of today's ROK-US alliance will be a major obstacle for both a Unified Korea and the United States to overcome in the post-unification era. More importantly, growing Korean national self-consciousness for self-defense and antagonism against foreign powers would put pressure on the Korea-US alliance to modify its role and nature into a more limited and flexible alliance. In this regard, the US military presence in Korea would be either reduced or withdrawn altogether. Interestingly enough, a 1999 survey in South Korea about views on the future of the ROK-US alliance after unification demonstrated that an increasing number of Korean people believe that the alliance should be maintained, but that US troops should be either reduced or eliminated completely.<sup>147</sup> As a result, the Korea-US alliance partners will face a dilemma in which they can not ignore the demise of the alliance, but can not pursue a consolidated alliance.

Facing such a dilemma, a Northeast Asian multilateral security system will be the most optimal means to compensate for the weakened former bilateral alliance in conjunction with growing economic, political, and security interdependence throughout the region. In the multilateral mechanism, Northeast Asian countries can minimize emerging conflicts by means of checks and balance. A Unified Korea would also benefit from this multilateral security system in ensuring its autonomy and creating a stable security environment. Therefore, both Korea and the United States should make efforts to

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<sup>147</sup> Norman D. Levin, Yong-Sup Han, The Shape of Korea's Future: South Korean Attitudes Toward Unification and Long-Term Security Issues, RAND, 1999.

expand the role of multilateral structures in dealing with regional security affairs and simultaneously encourage the major powers' active participation.

In addition, both countries should begin to work more seriously to make the alliance relationship more equitable, such as amending the SOFA, returning wartime operational control from the Combined Forces Command (CFC) to the ROK military, and other issues stemming from the asymmetrical alliance. These efforts are important tasks that could minimize the impacts of anti-American sentiment in the post-Korean unification period and ultimately avoid the complete disintegration of the Korea-US alliance.

At the start of the new century, Korea and the United States face changing dynamics on the Korean peninsula. Although Korean unification is generally expected to be a long-term process, it could come as early as tomorrow. That is the reason why the ROK-US alliance requires a comprehensive review right now. It is a time for wisdom and foresight in preparation for a better future.

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